THE PROPHETIC ELDER: RESTORING THE VOICE AND LEGACY OF THE SILENT GENERATION AS TRADITIONAL GRIOTS IN A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

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This narrative research model taught members of New Living Stone Christian Church in Newport News, Virginia that sharing their walk of faith is the responsibility of Elders in the Christian community. Mixed methods of research utilizing pre and post surveys, journaling, and video documentation were used to measure results. The goal was to prepare seniors to fulfill the role of Prophetic Elder, embrace the identity of traditional Griot in a Christian community and preserve their faith narratives for oncoming generations. As a result, seniors embraced their biblically mandated roles showing understanding and readiness to share and archive their faith narratives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King the triumphs of His grace." – Charles Wesley

Surely I am counted as one of the triumphs of God's grace, for it is by God's grace alone that I live and by God's grace alone that this work has been made manifest. I am thankful for the insight and instruction of my mentors, Dr. Michael Neil and Dr. H. Elaine Joyner. They have guided me to a higher place in God, in scholarship, and in esteem for myself. I am grateful for the counsel and encouragement of Dr. Harold Cottom my faculty advisor who was never too busy to help. I am also grateful for the guidance and inspiration of Dr. Jackie Baston.

I would like to thank my Professional Associates, Dr. Natalie Francisco, Dr. Jothany Blackwood and Dr. Albert Lewis for taking precious time to aid me in clarifying the vision for this project. I also extend thanks to Dr. Irvin Melvin and True Vine Missionary Baptist Church for the use of their classrooms for project implementation.

To the congregation of the New Living Stone Christian Church, especially those who participated in and supported this endeavor with prayer and encouragement, Deacon Elnathan Gladden, Connie Amos, Henri Ola Boyd, Gevonia Cropper, Deborah Graham, Lee Graham, Leroy Graham, Isabelle Lane, Deborah Simpkins, Ronald Wyckoff, Sr. and Pearl Wyckoff. I am indebted to them for the time, effort and passion they put into their participation in this project and for their belief in their Pastor.

I am especially grateful for the privilege of interviewing Dr. Ann Wimberly of the Interdenominational Theological Center. The conversation we had confirmed and affirmed the work of this project. Her insight, depth of knowledge, and ability to develop creative ministry for the Body of Christ is truly amazing and affirms every opinion I hold about the capacity of Elders in the Church to remain reliable and fruitful contributors to the work of the Church well into their latter years.

I would finally like to extend a special thank you to my editor Elizabeth Gatling who not only worked to perfect the content of the work, but was inspired and moved to ensure that the stories of the remaining Elder in her life would not go to the grave with him. To Dr. Cleveland Houser, Dr. Tammy Rodman, and my peer session roommates Michael Faulks and Anthony Nutt, thank you for challenging my intellect and never being too busy to give an encouraging word.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my grandparents, Deacon Howard Otho and Deaconess Hattie Otho whose memory gave life to this work that is inspired by the words and wisdom they possessed but were not able to pass down to me because they were gone to soon. To my parents Ronald and Pearl Wyckoff who have given immeasurable support to my family as I travelled and gave long hours to this endeavor. To my wife Kimberly who patiently endured this time of intense study and never let me get too far off task. I'm thankful for her unwavering belief that I could make it when I was losing faith in myself. To our children, Miles, Lauren, and Maxwell who have sacrificed having their Daddy's undivided attention, but never lacked my devotion as a father who will always do all I can for them. Finally to Dr. Fred J. Boddie, Jr, Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, Rev. Anderson W. Clary and the congregations of First Church of Newport News (Baptist) and Queen Street Baptist Church, Hampton, Virginia who led me to the Cross, developed me in discipleship, shepherded me in ministry and provided the prophetic voices that have spoken life to me down through the years.

ABBREVIATIONS

NLSCC	New Living Stone Christian Church
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

"…Thou wilt tell them how thou hast suffered and hast been comforted; then as the tale is unfolded, and the anodynes applied which once thy God wrapped around thee, in the eager look and the gleam of hope that shall chase the shadow of despair across the soul, thou shalt know why thou wast afflicted, and bless God for the discipline that stored thy life with such a fund of experience and helpfulness."

L. B. Cowman- *Streams in the Desert*

"Not everyone that speaks in the spirit is a Prophet, but only if he has the behavior (the ways) of the Lord. By their behavior then shall the false prophet and the [true] Prophet be known."

Didache 11:8

INTRODUCTION

In Alan Jacobs' book *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* these poignant words are found:

> Every real story. . . contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller…has counsel for…readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have not counsel for either ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to be able to tell the story. . . Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom. The art of storytelling is dying out because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out. [1]

Every life is a continuing story that, along the way, should pause to ask questions and seek direction from those who have travelled the road ahead. But the voice of wisdom for the road ahead has been tuned out by oncoming generations who have embraced sources of knowledge and direction that come from impersonal, digital sources versus a human being whose heart, soul and mind have experienced the joys, ease, sorrows, and rigors of life. The Body of Christ affirms that all of its help comes from the Lord, but the Body has overlooked the living epistles the Lord has placed among them. They are Elders bathed in wisdom and seasoned in the pragmatics of life. These messengers have a consistent walk of faith and have matured as a result of years of experiencing God's help. Yet, these messengers are silent.

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[1]Alan Jacobs. *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 8, Kindle Edition

The researcher believes that the silence of these messengers must be broken. The senior members of our Churches are perceived as objects of iconolatry set aside for tender loving care. They are pillars to acknowledge in passing as opposed to Elders at whose feet the Body of Christ should sit at every opportunity. They should shout and tell their stories of God's faithfulness on this side of glory to oncoming generations who are wandering like sheep without a shepherd, having no compass pointing the true direction or an anchor to hold them to a firm foundation. The Church must be intentional in arranging settings for the Elders to build relationships with the oncoming generations and for those generations to be inspired by them and glean their wisdom.

The researcher believes that Christian communities should be teaching communities. Christian Education serves as the appropriate ministry to restore senior congregation members to their Biblically mandated role as traditional Elders in the Christian community. There exists a dividing line between the formal teaching that comes from the Pastor/Teacher sent to the congregation to fulfill those ministries and the instruction that the Elders of the congregation should be giving to younger members concerning practical Christian living before the world and faith and faithfulness through difficult times. Bobby Joe Saucer stated that ministry among the elderly is characterized in part by, "respect for the wisdom, experience, and stories of those who have travelled many miles."[2]

The preparation of Elders from the Silent Generation to share their faith narratives with oncoming generations is studied in this doctoral dissertation. At first, the researcher believed the focus of the project should be limited to the archiving of stories for faith heritage conservation that could also serve as tools for discipleship and counseling. But as the project developed the researcher saw more compelling evidence from the state of the art for the model that another step

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[2] Bobby Joe Saucer, *Our Help in Ages Past: the Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 2005), 101

should be taken that would take the project beyond its original intent. The research in the state of the art presented compelling evidence for the need to prepare the elders in the researcher's context to be better prepared to build relationships with the generations into whose lives they would speak. The research of Ed Stetzer and David Kinnaman in particular make compelling arguments that more needs to be done to close the existing divide between the Elder generations and the generations following them on. For too long, the Church has been without the exhortation and guidance of the voices of this generation in part because of the emphasis on youth ministry that tends to divide congregations along generational lines. Other factors include the failure of leadership to provide intentional and innovative ministry to seniors and the lack of preparation of seniors and oncoming generations alike to engage with one another face to face in an age dominated by impersonal, digital media. The Digital Life column of National Public Radio's 'Weekend Edition' ran this story *We Need to Talk: Missed Connections with Hyper-Connectivity.* The interview highlights the way digital devices have moved society into a culture where texting and email is now the preferred mode of communication over talking face to face to the point where couples are choosing to fight by email versus face to face. Sherry Turkle, professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT laments, "We're also moving into a world where we are truncating our communications, making them briefer and briefer, where sometimes we're willing to sacrifice conversation for mere connection."[3] The interview continues emphasizing how texting and email have taken the humanity out of relationship, even to the point young people fail to understand how to apologize after making an offense. The illustration is given of a grandson who after being invited to dinner with his grandparents texts to them a curt "I'm not coming to dinner". The father makes the child go talk to his grandparents

[3]Rachel Martin, host. "We Need to Talk: Missed Communications with Hyper-Connectivity". *Weekend Edition Sunday.* Digital Life page, National Public Radio, www.npr.org. Feb. 10, 2013. Accessed Feb. 11, 2013.

face to face to explain why and to hear and engage with his grandparent's response. In the end the listener is reminded not to become totally dependent on technology for conversation but to leave room for intimacy and be able to discern when a face to face conversation is required. The researcher provides more detail on this social phenomenon in the state of the art section.

As a result of the application of "The Prophetic Elder: Restoring the Voice and Legacy of the Silent Generation as Traditional Griots in a Christian Community", the author is convinced that this ministry model is efficacious for the transformation of senior members of a congregation into Christian Griots with a prophetic voice that will call oncoming generations back to the living God through faith in Jesus Christ and preserve their faith and life narratives for generations to come.

The researcher has served senior members in traditional Baptist church contexts and in nursing home ministry for 17 years. In each of these contexts traditional senior ministries were in places that grouped seniors with seniors and planned activities for those in their "golden age" that made meaningful faith sharing and relationship building with other generations minimal to non-existent. The context of this research was the New Living Stone Christian Church, located in the city of Newport News, Virginia.

The researcher utilized qualitative and quantitative methods to compile the data presented in this dissertation. The methods included guided, inductive Bible study of the foundational scriptures of the project, video recording of teaching sessions, reaction to inquiry documented by participants in journals, a pre-survey, a gift inventory, and a post survey. The 10 seniors of New Living Stone Christian Church began the series of 6 teaching sessions. Only 4 completed the sessions for various reasons. The researcher believed that sessions teaching the Biblical mandate of prophetic eldership, provided an historical precedent from African-American history,

explained the reasons for generation gaps in the Church and ways to overcome those gaps. He/The researcher has examined the gifts of the participants and formulated a definition and identity of a Christian Griot for the Church to prepare the participants to share their faith narratives, accept the call, and embrace the identity of a Prophetic Elder whose voice of exhortation and wisdom would no longer be silent in their Church, their community, or their spheres of influence.

Chapter one will address the ministry focus, including the line of reasoning that presents Christian Education as the foundation upon which this research is constructed and connects the researcher's Doctor of Ministry peer group to the project. The experiences, gifts and synergy that brought the researcher and the local context together will be described.

Chapter two serves as a dialogue between the researcher and the state of the art in this project's ministry model. The literature review in this chapter includes theological and sociological perspectives on ministry to seniors. The review continues with literature on Christian Education pertaining to strategies for teaching and utilizing seniors in ministry. Also included are historical and theological works treating the history of African American faith transmission along with sources that explain the linking of stories from everyday life to biblical narratives. Literature on the building relationships within the Christian community between generations has also been examined including practical ministry application and research from the field that informs the Church on the necessary adjustments needed to encourage stronger ties of community and fellowship between generations.

Chapter three presents the researcher's examination of biblical, historical, and theological foundations on which this ministry model is grounded. In the biblical section, the researcher provides exegesis of Genesis 4: 3-7 and Titus 2:1-8. Elders in the Christian community are

responsible for being intricately involved in the lives of generations that follow them to offer redirection just as God tried to do with Cain. In the theological section, the researcher called upon the writings of liberation theologians such as J. Deotis Roberts, James Cone, and James Evans. The Black womanist voices of Katie Cannon and Dolores Williams address the voice of the woman as a determined teacher and moral agent in communities where women were treated immorally in an inherently patriarchal society. In the historical section, the researcher called on sources addressing the history of the Black experience of slavery from the west coast of Africa to the United States, Black preaching, quotes from the early Church Fathers on the aged in the Christian community, and practical application of oral history and Church history documentary concepts.

Chapter four establishes the design used to carry out the research. The methodology explained in this section includes the progression through all phases of the implementation as well as the expected results.

Chapter five will present an analysis and the results of the qualitative and quantitative data collected during the implementation sessions. The scope and sequence of the training modules created by the researcher is presented. A copy of these modules can be found in Appendix F. Details of the researcher's field experience are documented here. Analysis is given of pre-survey and post-survey data question by question along with correlations between the journal and video documentation. A major source and inspiration for this project has been the work of Dr. Ann Streaty Wimberly at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia. The researcher was fortunate to have interviewed Dr. Wimberly and the content of this interview is included in this chapter.

Chapter six serves as a summary and reflection on the implementation of the project. Surprises, changes and adjustments will be explained along with the project's impact on the field of Christian education and urban ministry planning. What has been learned and how the project changed the researcher's outlook on himself, his context, and overall ministry will be discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The motto of Dr. Jonathan Jackson, Jr. is enshrined on his biographical page on the Talbot School of Theology website, "Christian education is that ministry that undergirds all other ministries of the church." Christian education is not only at the heart of understanding the ordinances, disciplines, and doctrines of the faith; this ministry is necessary for passing on a living faith from generation to generation. A balance should exist in all areas of Christian learning and service that provide open doors for all generations to find expression of spiritual gifts and the call to ministry perceived by each believer.

Christian Education and Urban Ministry Development serves as an expression of the Biblical mandate to prepare believers for works of ministry in the unique and challenging urban settings where the light of Christ is so desperately needed. The urban context of ministry is in need of a vision for change that aligns the context to a more holistic expression of biblical faith, liberation of both oppressor and oppressed, and the restoration of accountability to family and community mores. Leaders and teachers work to formulate an educational and discipleship process through which the vision for change can be fulfilled.

The implementation and documentation of this project will bring to the forefront an addition to urban ministry tools that can assist in the restoration of a village/community atmosphere by restoring the Elder to their rightful place as an essential resource for knowledge and wisdom. These voices of faith, pragmatic knowledge, and tested wisdom are an integral part of the larger vision shared by many of a community that has its moral compass restored and its

foundation of faith, hope, and love laid anew. The project seeks to create positive change as it considers issues related to individual, family, and community brokenness and deep pain that are compounded by the challenges of a media and technology facilitated generation gap.

As individuals come to understand the presence and providence of God in their story through this project, they will in turn become comfortable sharing their faith narrative, and will serve as a prophetic voice, calling the hearer back to faith in God and encouraging deeper connections with fellow human beings that will result in a commitment to the peace and prosperity of their community.

Robert M. Franklin, in his response to the needs of Black communities in *Crisis in the Village,* speaks of the restoration of an audience of the generations centered on the village Elder. He writes, "Here again the village could and should convene to allow the elders in the village to tell stories about how "village parenting" was done."[1] Franklin ponders on the restoration of such institutions and the positive impact they could have in urban communities. In the area of moral conversion he describes the action as a "move from orthodoxy to orthopraxis . . . practice with a critical, reflective component always aimed at improvement and ongoing correction."[2] The Elders should be the ones that call the village council back into session. Through their wisdom, faith, and life stories, revival and spiritual renewal can begin to move the village in the urban setting back to practices that will lead to a culture of mutual dependency and accountability.

In a 1967 sermon, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted Reinhold Niebuhr's simple yet profound statement, "We may be able to put God back in nature by a little serious thought, but

[1]Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 2007 Kindle Edition), 82.

[2]Ibid., 166.

we cannot put God back in society without much cross-bearing."[3] This project lends it support to those already bearing the weight of the cross as it is carried back into our communities as the place to look to for healing, wholeness, and above all hope. Robert Franklin's *Crisis in the Village* was published in 2007, therefore it is considered well within the limits of being considered a current commentary on the state of affairs within the 'village' of the African American/black community, terms that Franklin uses interchangeably. Franklin's antithesis lends itself to the antithesis that this project must address. In terms of this project, The Prophetic Elder's voice is silent and should be restored as a response to the need for a renewed call to faith in God from the Elders of the black community and the sharing and preservation of their faith narratives and pragmatic wisdom. His antithesis rightly begins with what Franklin describes as naming our pain. It is the pain of the community that he admonishes the leaders who read his book to address. Franklin levels this criticism at leaders who, as he quotes from Carly Simon, "haven't got time for the pain", "But leaders who are unaware of, or uncomfortable with engaging and addressing, the pain of the people are unlikely to mobilize the power of the people."[4] Pain is present within the urbanized black community that Franklin describes as being found, ". . . wherever people of African descent are in the majority, whether by choice or circumstance, and they identify with the historical struggle for freedom that is a black village." [5] Within the black village, the epicenter of the pain according to Franklin is found in the crisis of what Franklin calls 'anchor institutions'. The anchor institutions that are in crisis according to

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[3] Richard Lischer. *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and The Word That Moved America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 231.

[4] Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 2007 Kindle Edition), 9.

[5] Ibid., 11.

Franklin are the church, the family, and the school. The Elders voices of faith and wisdom are needed as a part of the solution needed to strengthen each of these institutions.

These institutions are, ". . . the people's networks of support and vehicles for social change."[6] When these institutions are dysfunctional, the community is dysfunctional. The Elders remember the days when these institutions provided for the growth and stability of the community. But their silent voices contribute to the instability of these institutions that are essential to the health and progress of the black community. These are the key components of the village that blacks occupy, and it is blacks and black leaders that are accountable for the maintenance of the village.

Franklin engages in a critique of several works that deal with leadership that addresses problems in the black community that include actionable solutions to the problems and issues presented. One work, *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America* by John McWhorter, presents a 'scorecard for black leadership'. "In it, he contrasts "Black Leader A" and "Black Leader B." Black leader A "celebrates our victories" while Black Leader B "celebrates our victories only in parentheses under the impression that trumpeting our failures is more important because it lets whites know they are "on the hook" . . ."[7] Franklin continues, "Leader A is also: "committed to eventually getting past race," . . . . identifies racism and discrimination only after careful consideration," "interested in blacks succeeding in the system as it is and considers us capable of doing so . . ."[8]

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[6] Ibid., 11.

[7] Ibid., 32.

[8] Ibid., 32.

Leader B is then identified as one who, ". . . identifies racism and discrimination as the cause of all statistical discrepancies between blacks and whites . . . . is interested in blacks succeeding in a system transformed by a revolution and considers us incapable of doing so otherwise."[9] Franklin includes McWhorter's final analysis of Black Leader B and those that would follow such a leader, "Some will prefer Black Leader B, but people of this kind will have no influence on the future of black America. No one ever got ahead by getting back."[10] The tension and challenges to unity in the black community could very well be boiled down to those who follow these two different styles of leadership and the assumptions that go along with the kind of thinking and action each leader promotes or suggests. Each person in the community will chose to hate one and love the other, thus dividing the black community further along lines of leadership and courses of action versus identification of a common purpose and strategy for freedom and improvement. The use of divisive tactics to keep a people from living full lives in harmonious community is as old, or older, than slavery itself. The *Willie Lynch Letter* is an example of this theme of divisiveness and discouragement. Its content paints a picture of a people that has all odds stacked against their success, their unity, and their survival. A key portion of the letter that emphasizes creation of perpetual disharmony among the slave community is:

> Don't forget you must pitch the old black versus the young black and the young black male against the old black male. You must use the dark skin slaves versus the light skin slaves and the light skin slaves versus the dark skin slaves. You must also have your white servants and overseers distrust all blacks, but it is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect and trust only us.[11]

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[9] Ibid., 33.

[10] Ibid., 33.

[11] _____"Willie Lynch's Speech on Slave Control". *Crisis* Sept./Oct. 1999, Vol.106, 5 32.

It seeks to create divisions not only within the community, but to instill fear of blacks in the white community. While there are struggles with divisions within the community, this strategy and mentality has not been successfully perpetuated. To quite the contrary, African American congregations have a history of overcoming internal and external obstacles to unity. This unity is possible through the essence of African American spirituality.

Julia Speller of Chicago Theological Seminary refers to the powerful spiritual and communal principles found in the Nguzo Saba, the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa. Dr. Speller so aptly states of African American congregations:

> they have recognized the importance of upholding specific principles as markers to guide congregational life and ministry. Through the familiar principles of Unity, Self Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith, I believe we see a glimpse of the contours of an Africentric spirituality that moves congregations from simply celebrating their African heritage to being Africans in the context of American religious life.[12]

Dr. Speller also refers to the origins of Kwanzaa that are found in the social and cultural ideology of Kawadia, stating, "The basic concept of Kawaida centered on the contention that the key crisis in Black life is the cultural crisis of both views and values."[13] Africentric faith is a powerful, proven force in overcoming these crises of views and values to bring people of African descent in America into community, creating a record of faith, hope and love in spite of the obstacles. It is a record of families maintaining bonds in spite of the break-up of families. It is the record of stable nuclear and extended families, hard working mothers and fathers, and a commitment to a thriving and caring community. The voices of the Elders have been a binding force in the community and contribute to this restoration process.

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[12] Dr. Julia Speller. *Walkin' the Talk: Keepin the Faith in Africentric Congregations.* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 5, 6

[13] Ibid, 7

Where then should the community in general and the church in particular focus its energies in working towards unity and wholeness? One work addresses what Gardener C. Taylor described as, ". . . the cleavage between inner-city blacks and middle-class blacks . . ."[14] Marvin McMickle in his work, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class*, cites income disparity as a major cause of this division. McMickle rightly points out, "Indeed, poverty and prosperity present different challenges to human beings."[15] McMickle makes a significant point, ". . . all black people in America encounter racism, they do not encounter it in the same ways or in the same places."[16] In terms of this project, the Prophetic Elder also exists in each group, a group that has experienced poverty on the one hand and prosperity on the other but has had the same hope and trust in one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism. A lesson can be learned from these Elders who remember a time when the black community was forced to be galvanized because of the pressures of Jim Crow and racism. As McMickle so rightly observes, "People who lived in poverty and people who lived in prosperity . . . . were not strangers to one another because people who belonged to the neighborhood church still lived in the community where the church was located."[17] McMickle continues, "The single mother who worked two jobs to make ends meet knew that her children would pass a federal employee, a small-business owner, or a school teacher or administrator as they walked the streets of those neighborhoods."[18] The Prophetic Elders of the silent generation can recount these facts as a part of their faith and life narratives. The Elders can provide a strong voice for unity and reconciliation that answers the need for

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[14] Marvin A. McMickle. *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope.* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000), vii.

[15] Ibid., xii.

[16] Ibid., xii.

[17] Ibid., 3.

[18] Ibid., 3.

experiences that encourage community and create opportunities to find common ground. As much as racism, classism, and disunity through economic and social disparities exist, part of the solution can be found in the reconciliation of the village gathered at the feet of the Elders sharing the testimony found in their faith narrative and encouraging the gathering of the people in an effort to restore a fragmented community.

Christian Education and Urban Ministry Development possesses a corrective component that should cause both reflection on and redirection of the Christian community, leading it to live out the true meaning of being "doers of the Word". With a philosophy of ministry that encourages the empowerment of believers to carry out the ministry to which God has called them, the researcher believes the corrective action that will be brought about by the project should lead ultimately to self-examination, conviction towards renewal, and discovery of ministry gifts. Examination in the theoretical foundations of this work leads the researcher to conclude that effective urban ministry starts with a prophetic call to the principles of the Gospel found in Luke 4:18-19. Then discipleship and teaching can have the effect of liberating the community of faith. This ministry model does not depend on ordained clergy alone, but is infused into the community by Elders who, because of their age and maturity in the faith, are charged to share their faith narrative and encourage Christian living in their homes, communities, and other areas of influence as they are able.

The Pastor's task of equipping saints for works of service should include presenting information about and strategies for engaging people of different walks of life, ages, and traditions for the purpose of preparing disciples to make disciples. Part of making disciples is the passing of life lessons from Elder saints. The body of Christ as a whole could be healthier if the Spirit was flowing through real and healthy relationships among the different generations, with

every part fitly joined together, not split off into isolated age groups. More life can flow through the body facilitated by renewal and restoration of the role of Elder. The researcher envisions young ladies learning by sitting among wise, Elder ladies. The idea of young people being seen and having questions answered with such phrases as "keep on living" passes nothing on. No one is strengthened or edified with such quips. It is the same with older and younger men. The researcher has heard it said that everyone needs to be someone's baby. Even the toughest and strongest have a place in them that needs to hear a voice that nurtures and gives direction. Young people need to know that there is someone out there that really wants to relate to them, know them, and share help and hope with them. Generations beyond the teen years that have started careers and young families need the wisdom and faith narratives of Elders to guide them through the pitfalls of building careers and families.

The Researcher and the Area of Ministry

The researcher experienced the loss of his mother's parents beginning in his early teen years. First, his grandfather passed away as leukemia ran its course. Afterward, his grandmother began the journey through the stages of Alzheimer's disease. His father's grandparents were away and, while they were known for their steadfast faith, were not a consistent part of the researcher's life. Being a caregiver to his grandmother throngh the stages of Alzheimer's in his late teen years gave the researcher empathy for families who are caregivers for relatives as they face the challenges of end stage and end of life issues. The impact of the stress associated with unsupported care giving took a significant toll on the researcher's parents. Their marriage became strained and lead to a separation. The researcher observed at that time that the church did not minister to his family's need, neither was it equipped to handle snch

issues. This, the researcher observes, was a failure of the Christian community to bear the burden of a family that needed support through a deeply traumatic time. Those generations that had gone through this struggle did not make themselves and their experiences available to my mother. Throughout the researcher's ministry, he developed strong convictions about the body of Christ, the purpose of its presence in the world, and the relationship of its pastors to the people they serve. The pastor would serve as the example of reaching beyond the four walls to make disciples and encourage members to develop a vision for the fulfillment of their own reasonable service to the Lord.

The researcher is a History and Social Sciences professional currently teaching 8th grade Civics and Economics. After earning a Bachelor of Arts in History and Political Science at Virginia Union University, he worked in his field at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and The Mariners' Museum which gave him practical knowledge of historical research, storytelling, development of training modules, and community outreach. This love of History and Social Science led him to the Hampton Public Schools where the researcher created the first computer lab dedicated to technology integration in the teaching of History and Civics in Hampton City Schools and in partnership with the Hampton University Museum created the first oral history project dedicated to preserving oral histories of graduates of all black high schools in Hampton and Newport News. At the same time, the researcher earned a Master of Education focusing on technology integration in curriculum and instruction which further strengthened his abilities in the art of teaching and program development. His Masters project focused on the creation of a mobile computer lab for state standards remediation and professional development for educators.

The researcher, having been licensed to ministry, developed ministry skills under the Pastors of First Church of Newport News (Baptist) and Queen Street Baptist Church. In each context, the researcher served mature adults and seniors as a Bible study and discipleship development teacher as well as a regular participant in hospital visitation of the elderly and nursing home ministry. He began studies in ministry through the Evans-Smith Leadership Institute of the School of Theology at Virginia Union, Hampton University's Continuing Education program, and the Regent University School of Divinity. The equipping received at Regent University led to opportunities to train licentiate candidates for ministry in principles of Bible study and biblical exegesis. All the while the researcher continued to be positioned to serve older adults and seniors, developing a passion and concern for their stories and spiritual well-being.

The researcher continued to serve seniors of the silent generation upon installation as Pastor of Life Line Full Gospel Church. The researcher delayed finishing his second Master's degree, this time in Educational Leadership and Supervision, to focus on his new pastoral ministry. The eldest members of Life Line Full Gospel Church were born in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Due to conflict with the former pastor, the pastor and congregation moved to the United Jewish Community Center worshipping as New Living Stone Christian Church. The researcher remained bi-vocational. He was able to observe growth in senior's biblical knowledge as he taught them principles of Bible study, but he also realized that the treatment this congregation of Elders had experienced under the former pastor caused them to be withdrawn and unwilling to share vocally with the researcher out of their wisdom and experiences. Having observed and experienced congregational conflict, the researcher led the congregation through

personal transparency and encouraged them to let their voices be heard, insuring them that the wisdom and pragmatic experience they possessed matters and is much needed and appreciated.

After the researcher's first two first funerals as Pastor, the loss of key leaders and steadfast members brought to mind the fact that their knowledge, wisdom, skills, and experience were no longer accessible. Generations would no longer benefit from the knowledge that passed away with Elders . The researcher believes that the Elders should bring to mind and heart the importance of not only being heard but of documenting their faith narratives and pragmatic life experiences before they are gone. The researcher envisions a Christian community where generations are melded together with Elders comfortably sharing with as well as calling oncoming generations to account. The need for the Elders' voices extends into the surrounding community where their faith and wisdom has been replaced by a form of substitute wisdom learned from such sources as Twitter, Google, the Internet, and Facebook.

Context of Ministry Module

New Living Stone Christian Church is located in the City of Newport News, Virginia. Newport News is the fourth largest city in the Hampton Roads area and the sixth largest city in the entire state. Population estimates by the 2010 US Census are projected to be 198,200. The profile of Newport News' population is such that they are younger, better educated, and slightly more white collar than the national average. Approximately 35% of Newport News' population earns between under $10,000 and $35,000 dollars per year with 12.6% of that number earning under $15,000 per year. 88.4% of residents are High School graduates, about 3.2% percent above the national average. However, as of 2009 only about 23% of the population graduated from college, less than a quarter of the total population of the city! The national average is only about

28%. This should be considered a rather disturbing trend. The unemployment rate trends lower than the national average. 46% of the total population works in white collar jobs while just over half work in blue collar or sales and service occupations. In terms of gender, age and ethnicity Newport News has a slightly higher percentage of females (52%) to males (48%). The median age is 32 years old with half of the population ranging between 25 and 64 years old. Average household size is about 2.5 individuals. 52 % of the population is homeowners while the other 48 percent rent. The average annual pay in Newport News is about $40,000 per year.

The City of Newport News uses the council-manager form of government in which an elected city council and mayor make city policy through resolutions and ordinances while the city manager acts as an extension of the executive branch assuring that policy is administered and the work of all city departments is carried out. There are social services available in the city such as child welfare, protective services and social work programs. Medical, dental and family planning services are offered by the Peninsula Health Center. Over 2,000 units of subsidized and assisted housing are available but there is no emergency housing for families in need. Job training programs are available through the Office of Human Affairs. The median price of a 2,400 square foot home is $377,192 while a 950 square foot apartment is $850. Newport News Public Schools has a total population of 31,500 students between 5 early childhood centers, 26 elementary schools, 9 middles schools, and 5 high schools. Achievement gaps between blacks and whites have narrowed on all statewide examinations and the percentage of students graduating is 9 percent above the state average at 88%.

Healthcare is important to every community. Newport News has hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and mental health facilities. All services are available from heart and cancer treatment to rehabilitative services, pediatric and mental health care. Many churches are

interested in regular ministry to nursing homes. There are many retirement communities, convalescent facilities, and assisted living and nursing homes. Just over half of the 24 nursing homes on the Virginia Peninsula are located in Newport News. The congregation of New Living Stone Christian Church lives within this context. Context surveys were given to the congregation in two parts. The first was a member network survey. The second part surveyed cultural and spiritual identity. All members live in the City of Newport News except for the Pastor's family. The majority of members are retired, others are teachers, self-employed, in the nursing field, or office workers. The Pastor's children are in 3rd grade and high school. Several adults are grandparents who bring their grandkids from time to time. The congregation is made up of one major family, the Grahams. There are also couples in marriages of over 40 years. Several single women, divorced or widowed, have children who are out of state or deployed with the military. One grandmother alone has grandchildren in graduate schools across the state and country.

The works of service that the congregation accomplishes could be considered amazing for a congregation of about 20 people on any given Sunday. As always, however, there are some who do all and some that manage to do nothing yet enjoy the fruits of others' labor. The congregation serves the St. Francis Nursing Center monthly. It is a Catholic nursing home that is open to all. NLSCC gives the Protestant service there. The Pastor and Deacons present a weekly Bible study to the Pinecroft Retirement community. As many as 20 residents attend this weekly song, study, and fellowship service. The congregation recently took under its care an African refugee family that needed financial support and English language teaching. The congregation supported that family with clothing needs and tutored the mother in English as an additional language. The congregation has financially supported the translation of the Bible into foreign languages. When they were in their own facility, the church was a distribution site for the local

food bank. Some members struggle to find their gift while others know exactly what they believe the Lord has called them to. The Pastor is the primary teacher of the church, teaching Bible study weekly. Some members serve as Sunday school teachers. Several in particular have a heart for missions, taking part in doing the running around that is needed, as well as managing the finances of the church. The desire to help and serve abounds with many.

It will be important to prepare the current members of the congregation for growth through the addition of new disciples. As such their role should be clear and they should be introduced as the Elders of the congregation whose voices should be heard and their wisdom consulted. The project will serve to prepare those Elders for the time when they are called to take their place as the Griots of the village that New Living Stone Christian Church will become.

Synergy

The researcher recognizes a synergy between the deeply felt loss of his grandparents, which deprived him of the experience of hearing their faith and life narratives, and the need of the congregants in the current ministry context to realize that their voices should not be silent and that their faith narrative and life story can make a difference and should be heard. As an ordained minister and educational leader, the researcher recognizes further synergy with application of Christian Education and Urban Ministry Development concepts with his ministry context and the potential of this model to be the nucleus for creative multi-generational ministries of NLSCC to be envisioned, planned and executed. The strategies by which this Christian Education and Urban Ministry Development model will be executed also represent a synergy between the previous work of the researcher in History and Social Science, the preparation and experiences

of the researcher in ministry, and the philosophy and vision of the researcher concerning the Body of Christ and its responsibilities, not only to its many members, but to the world.

The researcher believes that the personal self-perception of the members of the congregation as well as their perception of themselves as disciples of Christ should be given serious consideration. The previous leadership of the Church played a role, by virtue of an autocratic leadership style, in lowering the esteem and self-worth of the congregants, causing many to leave before the researcher was installed and others to withhold their voice. The researcher seeks to raise the congregation's level of confidence in themselves and their ability to carry out a vision of service unto the Lord that is required of them as a result of the age to which they have lived.

To this end, the participants consider and dialogue concerning a definition of an Elder with a prophetic voice that calls generations back to faith in God but as a Christian Griot as well that is not only a keeper of faith narratives but one who also calls the community back to accountability and mutual dependency.

It is also a firm belief of the researcher that the participants should explore their own faith and life narratives as they relate any pain that has been covered over in their subconscious. The researcher will use questions and media that prompt reflection through journaling and discussion that will allow the participant to not only grasp the true nature of their story but also link their story to the scriptures and through an understanding of narrative theology and concepts of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation recognize the presence of God as an Elder in their own lives who was their help in their past and continues to be their help today.

The curriculum that will be used to train Prophetic Elders as Christian Griots will begin with inductive Bible study that the participants have already been trained to do. Along with Bible

study this curriculum will integrate reflection on the cultural and church precedents for the presence of the Elder as prophet and griot in a community. There will be dialogue with authors and information that examines the Elder as a part of a unique generation of people who are now confronted with a cultural shift of the norms and ideas of oncoming generations who question and communicate differently than the Elder is used to dealing with. The curriculum will then help the participant redefine their role in the Church, preparing them for transformation that will bring them to a new level of faith and service. The curriculum will be delivered in a traditional church classroom setting that is comfortable for the participant and possesses familiarity as a space where Christian education concepts of teaching and learning are practiced.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

It is important disclose how the term *prophetic* is meant to be used in the context of this project. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* the prophet's word group, "simply expresses the formal function of declaring, proclaiming, making known."[1] The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians contrasts a word from this word group, *propheteuon*, those who prophesy with the word for those who speak in tongues, *laleo glossa*. Paul makes this contrast as a part of the argument he makes that to prophesy is better than speaking in an unknown tongue. Charles D. Isbell, who at the time of this writing was Assistant Professor of Classics at the University of Massachusetts, has done thorough exegetical work in his article *Glossolalia and Propheteialalia: A Study of 1 Corinthians 14.* He determines that, "the term *propheteuo* and its cognate nominal forms are used to depict description and definition far more than prediction. It is also clear that Paul's use of this root in 1 Corinthians refers, not to prediction and those who can predict, but to describers and apologists."[2] Paul writes, "On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding, and encouragement and consolation." (1 Corinthians 14:3 [New Revised Standard Version]). The researcher argues in this project to bring forward Elders within the Christian community precisely to fill this role.

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[1] G. Kittel, G. Bromiley, G. Friedrich, eds. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic edition. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

[2] Charles D. Isbell, "Glossolalia and propeteialalia: a study of 1 Corinthians 14." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 10 Spr. 1975, 15-22. *ATLASerials, Religion Collection,* EBSCO*host* (accessed January 12, 2013).

The prophetic gift is meant to be used to exhort and admonish the body of Christ rather than as a way to predict the future. Understanding is necessary in the Christian community as opposed to ecstatic utterances that are unclear and fail to lift up the hearers in their midst. The oncoming generations must hear the Elder's prophetic voice clearly.. Paul writes of the importance of understanding to building relationships in verses 10 and 11. He illustrates that there are many different sounds in the world but, "If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me." (1 Cor. 14:11) There are enough barriers and gaps between the generations caused by technology and "slang". Paul calls for a voice of clarity that will serve not only to convict the hearer but to break down barriers between generations as well as guide and uplift them. Isbell concludes that Paul's message in this text is that the prophetic voice is most beneficial to the hearer over and above speaking in an unknown tongue for bringing about not only peace but conversion as well. The term is then applied to the Elder for the same reason. The Elder's prophetic voice should call to generations with clarity and significance to bring about repentance and conversion as well as to bring the generations together and strengthen the Church for its mission in the world.

Who are the Elders? They are commonly known as the "Builder" or the "Silent" generation. They are seniors born before World War II with strong values and faith, and are strong supporters of the local Church.[5] They have gained insight to life from their many years of experience and have reached a level of maturity in the faith that has given them much spiritual wisdom. The oncoming generations are all of the generations after the Builders who are in desperate need of wisdom and direction and for whose sake the silence of the "silent generation" must be broken.

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[5] Alvin Lewis, *Strategies for Educating African American Adults* (Chicago: Urban Ministries,Inc, 2006). 22

From the social sciences perspective, Clark and Foos in their text *Human Aging,* the wisdom Elders possess is defined as, "expert-level knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life." [6] Elders should be given an opportunity to pass on their pragmatism; what simply works in life. Those with wisdom have been described as those with, "extensive expertise, being able to control emotions, considering all points of view, concentration, and going beyond the limitations of persons or situations."[7] The wise are able to, "use good judgment" and "give advice in important but uncertain matters of life."[8] The creativity of Elders may increase if new areas of interest are found. Clark and Foos list several Elders including Maya Angelou, Claude Monet, Benjamin Franklin, Marian Anderson and Antonio Stradivari who exhibited some of their most creative work between their 70's and 90's.[9] The Church should provide meaningful ministries that challenge seniors to continue to respond to the call of God, continuing to equip them for works of ministry versus making a concession to live life on the sidelines because they have reached a certain age or experienced a life altering crisis in their health or family, i.e. becoming a widow or widower. The research model for The Prophetic Elder will rely on sources that illustrate and reinforce the necessity of encouraging elders to continue to work out their salvation and resist the temptation to become idle.

There are a number of resources that form the intersection of Christian Education and the encouragement of the continual sharing of faith narratives of Elder saints as a way of sowing faith, hope, love and empowerment into oncoming generations. A definition of Christian Education found in *Basics of Christian Education* by Karen B. Tye, which was written as a

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[6] M.Cherie Clark, Paul W. Foos, *Human Aging* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003) 167

[7] Ibid., 167

[8] Ibid., 168

[9] Ibid., 175

response to a 1990 Search Institute study entitled *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations.* While the study findings raised significant concerns, its conclusion was optimistic citing the power of Christian Education to influence life biographies, congregational life, faith, maturity, and loyalty. [10] Tye proposes a form of Christian Education that not only tells the Christian story but causes the disciple to act out and reflect on their faith with the goal of living an active life in the body of Christ. The components of this definition promote both faith conservation and faith transmission which fit the scope and purpose of this project.

Likewise the origin of the term griot deserves consideration as to the origin and purpose of such persons. It is important to recognize the complexity of the griot's identification in the African world. Each people group in Africa perceived the role of the griot and their position in society differently. Thomas A. Hale is done extensive research on the origin and work of the Griot in West African societies. Hale suggests that the term *griot* is not only of non-African origin, but that the modern day use of the term and purpose of the griot is far from the original meaning and intent. While the position of griot is hereditary it is also considered a profession. Griots were known to be advisors, "to rulers, as tutors for princes, and as diplomats in delicate negotiations."[11] From the earliest recorded observances they have perceived as wise advisors with great skill and ability. Yet they have also been feared and even looked upon with disgust. Again, each people group viewed the griot differently. From Senegal to Mali to Niger, the West Africans in these areas have a, "fear of the power of words spoken or sung by griots."[12]

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[10] Karen B. Tye, *Basics of Christian Education* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000), 3.

[11] Thomas A. Hale. From the Griot of *Roots* to the Roots of *Griot*: A New Look at the Origins of a Controversial African Term for Bard. *Oral Tradition* 12 no. 2 (October, 1997) 250 http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/12ii/2_Hale.pdf (accessed April 3, 2013)

John S. Mbiti's work on the traditions and philosophy of African religions stresses the differences in western religious practice versus the diversity of African religious practice among varying people. Where in the African American Church speaking a positive and even a prophetic word over a person is welcomed, it is looked upon with suspicion and even superstition in these communities.

The origin of the term *griot* is debated because, "no one had ever clearly documented the origin of *griot* in an African language."[13] The name of the profession is different among each people group. For example, among the Mandinka they are known as *jali* while the Wolof call them *mabo.* The term *griot* may well have been a misprint in the re-writing of a 1637 account of a voyage to the Senegambia region by Alexis de St. Lo, *Relation du Voyage du Cap-Verd.* Hale also quotes a letter from the French colonial administrato Le Brasseur from 1778, "a *grillot* is a species of negro actor whose theatrical costume resembles that of Harlequin."[14] Scholars of French, Nigerian and American origin have debated the origin of the term. They have suggested origins as *gueroual* from the Wolof, *gawlo* from the Fulbe, and *gerio* from the Mande. Again, the diversity of origin speaks to the diversity of purposes for this profession in each society. Hale continues with a number of possible sources both European and African. It is interesting to note that each country that took West Africans into slavery, among the Spanish, Portuguese, and French all came to some variation of the term. Hale references the written accounts of the first encounters of ship captains with African chiefs.

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[12] Ibid., 249.

[13] Ibid., 251.

[14] Ibid., 252

"Written accounts of meetings between Europeans and chiefs often emphasize the fact that local rulers emphasize the fact that local rulers were usually preceded by griots, the people who announced them and who made the most noise with their loud shouts, songs, and instrumental music."[15] What is clear from the article is that the griot is a trained, hereditary profession. The skills of griots range from singing, to playing a variety of instruments. They are wise preservers of knowledge, celebrants and educators as well as trade workers who serve both their communities and high ranking officials. With the knowledge of the diversity of the West African origins of the griot, the researcher can confidently adapt the work of the Christian griot to the needs of the urban village and the Christian community. The traditional griot's diversity is a strength because the Christian griot has the flexibility to do what is necessary to reach their intended audience.

When the audience of the Christian griot is considered, it is found to be not only deeply troubled but also deeply divided. These divisions may well come from the kind of social isolation that is found in urban communities that is not only caused by the influences of technology but emotional pain as well. Emotional pain caused by negative experiences ranging from abuse to failure to reach life goals can cause an individual to become what Edward Wimberly calls relational refugees. In his book of the same name subtitled, "Alienation and Reincorporation in African American Churches and Communities", we find a strong argument for one of functions of the Christian griot, that of one who can assist in the reincorporation of alienated people into the Christian community. Physical and emotional oppression can be considered push factors that cause individuals to alienate themselves.

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[15] Ibid., 259.

Wimberly explains that the oppressed are, ". . . those who have been deceived by society into thinking that cutting themselves off from family, community, and past generations will lead to growth and life enhancement. In other words, my term relational refugees refers to those who have become homeless primarily because they have cut themselves off from community of the living and of the ancestors."[16] Wimberly contends, "relational refugees need to restore for themselves nurturing relationships that can address their emotional needs."[17] The researcher finds that this affirms some of the research in other texts, ie. Kinnaman and Stetzer, that what seems to be missing is nurturing relationships in the Church and community. With these relationships restored, separation caused by lack of authentic relationships can be healed and mended. The community outside of the Church is in view in the text as Wimberly suggests solutions to very practical cases that can be found anywhere. The answer to George's self loathing in the text is found in his, "entrance into an apprenticeship of love and nurture with a trustworthy friend or mentor who can lead him back to human community and companionship."[18] The Prophetic Elder is one who fits the profile of one who calls the community back together through these kinds of positive relationships. The sharing of the faith narrative of the Christian griot can serve to develop a common bond that can be the catalyst for the development of a positive relationship. The Prophetic Elder as Christian Griot also falls in line with Wimberly's suggestion on how to develop positive self-understanding.

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[16] Edward P. Wimberly, *Relational Refugees: Alienation and Reincorporation in African American Churches and Communities* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 22.

[17] Ibid., 23.

[18] Ibid., 23.

He suggests, "Human beings also develop positive self-understanding by adopting and indentifying with positive narratives and roles through which they can orient their lives. Such narratives and roles are provided by caring communities and mentors."[19] The faith narrative of the Elder plays a significant role in building relationships with oncoming generations. The Prophetic Elder is an example of what Wimberly calls an indigenous model of ministry that can incorporate mentoring into the model, while creating mentors is not the primary function of the model. The African American Church and community has, ". . . long practiced and supported mentoring relationships that foster individual growth and self-actualization."[20] Wimberly sees these relationships as a part of a continuum of care that includes appropriate pastoral counseling. If incorporated, the Prophetic Elder can be integrated into the care that individuals receive as part of a nurturing relationship that assists in rebuilding the life of the relationally alienated person. Wimberly is by no means naïve in his assertions of the effectiveness of his model when it comes to the African American community in the context of a society in which African Americans are still the minority. Wimberly acknowledges a spirituality rooted in Africa, adapted to Christianity, and played out, ". . . within a society that has dominant values that affect our lives . . . . which we cannot escape, that influence our various levels of mentoring."[21] What influences the Prophetic Elder is that foundational belief that the solution to the negative impact of not only the values of the dominant society but the social ills that plague the community from within is a return to walking with God in obedient faith.

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[19] Ibid., 24.

[20] Ibid., 25.

[21] Ibid., 26.

Relational refugees will hear the call of the Elder in the community and as Wimberly describes, ". . . become *pilgrims*, who are able to feel at home in the world, to participate in the life of a significant faith community, to engage in a purposeful and meaningful future."[22] In his chapter on African American mentoring as a model for pastoral care Wimberly begins by affirming the oral tradition. He writes, ". . . [A]frican Americans transmit our cultural heritage through oral tradition and apprenticeship like relationships."[23]

While Wimberly identifies this as mentoring, the researcher argues that the acting out of the oral tradition need not lead to a mentoring relationship although that type of relationship would seem like the most reasonable next step. This flexibility is maintained, however, through the definition of the traditional griot which is an apprenticed profession. But the understanding remains that the unique difference lies in the fact that the Prophetic Elder's task is not to train another Elder but to call the hearer back to a new or restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The Prophetic Elder need not enter into a formal mentoring relationship. The concept is predicated on the belief that, as was explained in the definition of the term *prophetic*, the gathering of the Christian community together to hear the faith narrative and the encouragement of the Elder to come back to God is the purpose of the Elder's role in this instance. However, it is expected that the hearer would seek to apply that which the Elder has shared to their own life, thus Wimberly's idea of mimetic theory comes into play. The inspiration of the story prompts the mimicking of the life and lifestyle of the Elder by the hearer.

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[22] Ibid., 27.

[23] Ibid., 31.

Wimberly acknowledges this when he writes, "Through stories, we learn to be selves and act certain ways. Through roles, we discover healthy ways to interact with others. Through repeating scenes, we rehearse our responses to new situations. Through internalizing the attitudes of others, we grow in emotional maturity. [24] With mimicking, the journey toward a transformed life begins. The effects of the oppression that caused the individual to become a relationship refugee are counter-acted. Faith development begins and liberation follows a strongly developed faith. The Prophetic Elder's faith narrative becomes a guide to different ways of living and a prompt toward rebuilding faith that has been damaged or lost due to the oppressive experiences of the hearer. The Prophetic Elder's scripturally themed narrative relates to the hearer that God is very present in personal struggles.

Wimberly writes, "Christianity, as a living faith, produces change, the kind of change that relational practical rationality and mentoring also aim to produce. Christians are called to get involved in God's transformation of the world."[25]

While God is present in personal struggle, it is also true that every story does not have a happy ending. Just as God was not able to persuade Cain toward a new point of view that would have restored him to God and his brother, some of the most painful stories conveyed in life are those of people who are sick and cannot recover. All of the Elders, the members of this project's context, have faced illness that is terminal or potentially terminal that has taken, or threatened to take the life of loved ones. They have either been taken suddenly or over the course of time. Those taken over the course of time endured pain and treatments, moving from hope to beyond hope. Each of these Elders, in this case, can be considered a wounded storyteller.

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[24] Ibid., 34.

[25] Ibid., 39.

The Rev. Mr. Alexis Versalle, Chaplain at Margaret R. Pardee Hospital, Hendersonville, North Carolina, talks briefly about the creation of life stories in his article *Practicing the Wounded Storyteller.* He begins with the insight that, "The story is the way we create our lives. It's how we tell ourselves who we have been, who we are, and who we might become."[26] Those who tell the story of their wounds have dealt with, ". . . some adversity that threatens to undo them."[27]If the wounded come through the adversity, even with scars, they are able to say they have overcome through what is called a 'restitution story'. Versalle describes them as conquering heroes with a happy ending. But Versalle also knows this reality as a chaplain, that, ". . . restitution isn't always possible. Sometimes a devastating event occurs that leaves the person facing a future with no map and not sure destination."[28] A chaos story, as this is called, is a moment that Walter Brueggeman describes as 'disorientation'. These are certainly stories that shake an individual out of an orientated life of stability into shock and uncertainty. Versalle describes these moves in these stories as unpredictable and out of control. He laments, "Hospitals hate chaos stories, because they taunt us with our helplessness."[29] In every life there is a story of a feeling of helplessness whether it is being conveyed or heard. Elders have them and the oncoming generations they serve will have them. There will be times when it seems there is absolutely no help and no hope. This is where the Prophetic Elder can step in and offer their story of hope and help that will encourage and strengthen the healer through this time. Even if the Elder holds their peace and says nothing, the ministry of presence may well be enough in that

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[26] Alexis Versalle."Practicing the Wounded Story Teller" *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling.* 63, no. 1-2 Spr/Sum 2009.

[27] Ibid., 1.

[28] Ibid., 1

[29] Ibid., 1

moment for the one to whom they are ministering. Versalle lifts the pall over the article by describing the quest story. This is the story of the hero who, ". . . is called to accomplish a feat . . . . encounters obstacles and set backs . . . . experiences success . . . . (then) pays a price."[30] The hero experiences a type of reorientation, as described by Brueggeman. The hero does not return to life as it was before the quest began. They return to find some sort of change, for good or for ill. But the end of the story is cause for celebration. "But the hero doesn't return empty handed. He brings back something new to be used for the betterment of the people. It's hard won, but an accomplishment worthy of the struggle."[31] Even though the hero pays a personal price, the community benefits from the hero's struggle on their behalf. The Prophetic Elder may share a struggle like this. The Elder's work may be likened to this quest story as well. The Elder may in some stories portray the hero of the quest, sharing the sacrifices made and victories won. The ministry of the Prophetic Elder may be considered a quest in and of itself as they make known their victories as well as failures for the greater good of oncoming generations and their community. Versalle ends with this truth, "Every story demands a teller and a listener. No story is complete unto itself, because no life is complete unto itself. We are most truly ourselves when we stand in relationship with another person."[32] The Prophetic Elders are willing to make themselves vulnerable, sharing their stories in order to restore relationships and instill faith. No life story, as Versalle comments, is neat and linear, much less completely straightforward. Just as a life may move through periods of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation; so may a life

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[30] Ibid., 1.

[31] Ibid., 1.

[32] Ibid., 2.

story move from a quest, to chaos, to restitution. Through all of these periods, Elders have fought through and kept the faith.

Another layer of the foundation for this project is found in Dr. Alvin Lewis's *Strategies for Educating African American Adults* where he encourages:

> To engage in…creative Christian education requires rethinking the way we teach and what we teach. We may need to review, reinvent, and rewrite the curriculum materials handed down to us. New approaches and methods may require teachers to seek training on how to teach adult learners.[33]

Lewis suggests classes, workshops and conferences for older adults that inspire them to an active life and bring to them a practical teaching ministry. Lewis goes on to describe learning as drama that "is best experienced when both the teacher and the learner can come away from the session with positive feelings, knowing that discovery and enlightenment have taken place."[34] The teacher in this project would be the Elder believer and the learners would be oncoming generations. The Elder should come away from the experience with further affirmation of a life well-lived while the younger will have life lessons and strategies passed on to them which instill new hope and lead to a transformed life. Lewis confirms the social science foundation by listing reasons for the importance of utilizing older members. Among the reasons are they have skills, they are motivated, they are discerning, and they have influence.[35] When conversations between Elders and oncoming generations are intentionally planned they can bring the knowledge, skills and abilities of Elders to the forefront to let oncoming generations know that there need not be a divide between the generations and that the Elders are still available to them as a resource for encouragement that life's struggles can be overcome.

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[33] Alvin Lewis, *Strategies for Educating African American Adults* (Chicago:Urban Ministries,Inc.2006), 17.

[34] Ibid., 17

[35] Ibid., 43

The literature supporting this research stresses the need for the involvement of senior adults in the ministry. Howard G. Hendricks, in *Reaping the Rewards of Senior Ministry,* laments, "Yet one of the most neglected parts of our churches is the rapidly expanding number of seniors." Hendricks quotes J. Oswald Sanders poignant statement, "Generally speaking, the aged form the group least imaginatively catered for in the church's programme."[36] This project answers the need for this ministry with its goal of preparing Elders to speak into the lives of others as well as leave a legacy by archiving their stories for the church with modern digital technology. This kind of senior ministry engages the Elders by honoring their faith story and will revitalize them with self-worth. Hendricks argues, "Programs that motivate youth and mid-lifers are ineffective with many saints. Traditional meetings or newfangled worship style often bypass the real needs of seniors."[37] All seniors will not relate to contemporary ministry styles. Therefore leaders should make every effort to ensure inclusiveness and balance in the ministry program. One of the needs of seniors is to understand how necessary and relevant they are to the mission of the church. The process of retirement can give way to a re-visioning of their purpose at this stage of life. A part of this re-visioning of their lives can include preparation as a prophetic voice that calls church and community back to God and leaves a record of their life and faith for future generations.

Bobby Joe Saucer's and Jean Elster's *Our Help In Ages Past: The Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly* provides an understanding of the necessity of including Elders in the life of the Church and in its ministry. They argue that, due to advances in medical technology, the elderly have possibilities for longer life and greater quality of life.

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[36] Howard G. Hendricks, "Reaping the Rewards of Senior Ministry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (October-December 2000) 387-96.

[37] Ibid.

The Leukemia and Alzheimer's that took the researchers grandparents are treated much more successfully in recent years. So with longer life comes greater opportunity for Elders to fulfill their responsibility to transmit their life lessons and their faith. Saucer and Elster's work supports the idea that African American Elders are a source of necessary knowledge and wisdom and they should not be ostracized but considered essential parts of the life of the Church. Saucer and Elster encourage, "The aim is to foster a context where younger African Americans can petition seniors to tell their life stories. We must create an environment that encourages not only curiosity but respectful listening as well."[38] The researcher also suggests that ministry that lifts up the Elders before oncoming generations be intentional, not passive, so that Elder and younger generations alike know that trhe Elder is held in a place of high esteem in the Church.

Further support for the work is found in James H. Evans' *We Have Been Believers.* Godin the African American experience is addressed in the third chapter of the work and brings to bear ideas of God's providence as well as the transformation of religious consciousness and social existence. References from this chapter will be used in the didactic sessions to affirm the use of what has come to be known as *God talk* which as Evans illustrates is experiential, metaphorical, analogical, and functional. Participants in the didactic sessions are reminded that God talk is an essential part of being prophetic. However, this God talk cannot be expressed through what has come to be known as "Christianese", the language of the "churched" that the "unchurched" do not recognize or understand. God talk serves to make the reality of God even more personal. This kind of talk is essential to connecting with oncoming generations and useful in making God real to the hearer as Christian witness is given.

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[38] Bobby Joe Saucer. *Our Help in Ages Past: the Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly.* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 2005.), 83.

Alan Jacobs makes a significant argument for narrative theology in his work *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life.* Jacob's examination of narrative theology affirms that personal stories are testimony to be shared. This model of a faith narrative requires the willingness to examine life stories and experiences in preparation for documentation. Jacobs makes reference to the fact that Puritans wrote spiritual diaries to keep track of their perseverance in the faith. Jacobs uses the philosophical affirmation of Soren Kierkegaard that life must be understood backward and then lived forward. The words of Kierkegaard can make for an interesting discussion during the phase of the project that concerns why each faith story is important. Jacobs concludes that the wisdom gained from the real life experiences of an individual constitutes authentic counsel.[41]

At the heart of the Prophetic Elder project is a vision of a Christian community that embraces an active pursuit of the relationships illustrated in the foundational scriptures of the project. Titus 2 is the New Testament foundational scripture, and a study of how to live this scripture has been made by Susan Hunt in her work entitled *Spiritual Mothering.* The work embraces Titus 2's mandate for Elders to share themselves and their lives. The focus is on the practical things of life and how this sharing is a form of service to others that also serves to pass on the faith. It appears that telling stories of the evidence of God's presence and faithfulness in the life of one believer can encourage and strengthen the life of another believer by offering affirmation of the choice to live a godly life. The same type of spiritual mothering can also give rise to spiritual fathering. Much of the material in the work can be compared and contrasted to the context of a spiritual fathering relationship. For example, while an illustration of giving birth can be cast alongside spiritual mothering, an illustration of taking responsibility and assuming

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[41] Alan Jacobs, *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.:Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 8.

one's own position can be cast alongside spiritual fathering. Hunt comments on the women she observed in writing this book, "They have translated Biblical truth into vibrant relationships."[42] Older men have the capacity to develop the same kind of relationships with younger generations.

The Elders will receive training in understanding the generations to which they may tell their story. Sources such as *Lost and Found* by Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes speak to the needs and identity of the younger un-churched crowd. The researcher found that cross generational connections were a necessity in order to reach and retain younger generations. What stood out in the researchers findings was, "An apparent desire for relationships that exemplify learning from others' wisdom and experiences."[43] This text has raised awareness of the need to build relationships with the un-churched by people who are more experienced in life so they can learn from others' mistakes and meet their practical as well as their spiritual needs. Based on the findings, the authors devote a chapter to the need for cross-generational ministry that blends together different age groups.

Why does this conversation between Elders and oncoming generations need to take place? It needs to take place because the Elders are being lost at such a rapid rate. A voice of expertise, a mind full of wisdom, and an intellect filled with creativity is lost daily. The necessity of the preservation of the oral history and traditions of significant generations has always been a part of the philosophy of historical research and preservation. A significant model for this project is found in the Federal Writers Project, a division of the Works Progress Administration established by the Roosevelt administration as a response to the Great Depression that provided

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[42] Susan Hunt, *Spiritual Mothering: The Titus 2 Model for Women Mentoring Women* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992), 5.

[43] Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: the Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Books, 2009), 126.

opportunities for professionals to earn incomes in their fields. A subdivision of the Federal Writers Project was the Virginia Writers' Project which in turn began the Negro Studies Project whose purpose was, "the collection and publication of authentic material on Negro life in Virginia since Jamestown."[44] The result of this project was an oral history entitled *The Negro in Virginia.* One premise of the researcher's work is that there are certain questions that can only be answered by the Elders, the silent generation, that are the focus of this project. It is the same premise of the Virginia Writers' Project, "There are questions about the slave system that can be answered only by one who has experienced slavery."[45] A question posed by the researcher is a common question among oral historians, a question asked by the Virginia Writers' Project, "What form of questionnaire are you going to use in talking with these old folks?"[46] The difference between the Virginia Writers' Project and the researcher is that the researcher has considered the form of questionnaire that will be used for the project which includes focused questions that are founded on Walter Bruegemann's concepts of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation found in his work *The Spirituality of the Psalms.* The suggested questions list from the *Story Corps Griot* project created by National Public Radio also informs the researcher's selection of questions as well as the accepted oral history guideliues of the *Southern Oral History Program* at the University of North Carolina. The trained oral historian, however, is not so much interested in keeping with a specific set of questions as they are with listening intently to the responses of the narrators and sensing the direction in which the narrative is going.

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[44] The Writers' Program, Works Progress Administration, State of Virginia. *The Negro In Virginia.* (Winston-Salem, NC.: John F. Blair, Publisher, 1994), viii.

[45] Ibid., 29.

[46] Ibid., 29.

The researcher agrees with the interviewers of the Virginia Writers' Project that, "Talks with other ex-slaves convinced us that what many had to tell was infinitely more important than what they were asked. They needed no prompting or interviewing; all they desired was an audience that would not interrupt."[47] The researcher feels this sentiment parallels with the work of recording faith narratives. What the Elders have to tell could very well be much more important that what the researcher has to ask. This is what the interviewer should be to the narrator, an audience that will not interrupt. The interviewer can act as a facilitator as the story is told, prompting more details when needed and redirecting if the narrator strays too far outside of the purposes of the interview. For those who would carry this research forward into their own context, the researcher would suggest becoming familiar with the skill of listening, one that is usually under developed or taken for granted altogether.

The importance of listening cannot be underestimated as it relates to this project. Emma Justes in her *Hearing Beyond the Words* and Michael Nichols' *The Lost Art of Listening* have much to say on the subject of effective listening. While Justes work is a guide for pastor's to hone listening skills necessary for pastoral ministry, Nichols work applies to all who wish to improve a skill that is not only essential to the work place but essential to life itself. A premise of this project is the value of the Elders story. If their story is of such significant worth, we are compelled to consider the need for an effective listener to found in the interviewer and the intended audience who are the generations that follow the Elders. As Nichols points out, "Speaking without listening, hearing without understanding is like snipping an electrical cord in tow, then plugging it in anyway, hoping somehow something will light up."[48]

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[47] Ibid., 30.

[48] Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening.* (New York: Guilfield Publications, 1995), 1.

Justes would take this a step further, lamenting that for the amount of talking in which the human race is engaged, there is still a valuable piece missing. "The amount of "communication" and the number of so-called talk shows would lead one to think that a lot of listening is going on. Not necessarily. Quality listening is not taking place."[49] Justes goes on the write that a certain feeling of connectedness is missing. This can carry over into disconnections between generations. What flashed through the mind of the researcher at this moment is the classic piece of African American art painted by Henry Ossawa Tanner entitled *The Banjo Lesson.* This iconic work, in the researcher's eyes, tells the observer that what an individual values will be shared and passed on so that it survives and becomes embodied in the next generation. But it also speaks to the value that the next generation must place in the knowledge of the Elders. One can imagine the scenario that brought the two together: the Elder is playing a tune. The youth approaches and like any innocent child asks, "will you let me play?" The youth may have entered the experience initially for the opportunity to strum the banjo. But as time is spent together and the Elder takes the opportunity to sow into the youth through sharing time and talent, the youth becomes connected to the Elder by being present with him in a shared experience, hanging on every word. In that moment, the banjo lesson can very well become a life lesson and a memory that connects values of the Elder's generation to the generation coming after. Justes has identified the terms that she interchanges in her work to describe deep listening, ". . . true hearing, caring listening, effective listening, pastoral listening, healing listening." There is likely caring listening being shared in *The Banjo Player.* The work can evoke the idea of need for interdependency between generations.

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[49] Emma J. Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xi.

Nichols' view of individualism in modern culture draws a significant contrast to the values portrayed in the image, "Modern culture has developed conceptions of individualism that picture us as finding our own bearings within, declaring independence from the webs of interlocution that formed us, or at least neutralizing them."[50] *The Banjo Player* and its imagery speak to the researcher's desire to bring generations together through the Elder's sharing significant life experiences. But if modern culture has developed conceptions of individualism, the tools of that individualism can certainly be found in the current technologies that claim to make it easier for people to come together but become problematic when those tools are used to cut back meaningful words or curtail the length of what should be a meaningful moment of sharing and bonding that encourages a stronger community. Nichols postulates that losing the art of listening could very well be the result of embracing these tools. "Too tired to talk or listen, we settle instead for the lulling charms of electronic devices that project pictures, make music, or bleep across display screens."[51] But Nichols also finds that the exact opposite is just as plausible, "But maybe the modern approach to life is the effect rather than the cause . . . . we're seeking some sort of solace, something to counteract the dimming of the spirit we feel when no one is listening."[52] So this project, according to Nichols, may face a significant obstacle: the current way of life in our communities, the village where the gathering of generations around the Elders should take place. The advantage comes from the potential that stories have to captivate the listener. The experiences of the Elder may well sound as if the listener has travelled through a time machine.

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[50] Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening.* (New York: Guilfield Publications, 1995), 1.

[51] Ibid., 2.

[52] Ibid., 2.

But it is hoped that those who listen will actually be able to identify with the Elder and find that the hearer and the speaker are not so different and that they actually do need each other, and faith in God, to survive and overcome life's struggles. But Nichols points out, "When people don't listen to us, we can't help feeling it's their fault: they're selfish or inconsiderate. (When we don't listen, it's because we're bored or tired or don't like being talked down to.)"[53] One of the Elders who participated in the didactic sessions wrote in frustration that people just do not want to listen any more. But Nichols believes there are real reasons other than the lack of desire to listen, that people do not listen. Among the reasons being the very assumption that the one the speaker would like to communicate with does not wish to listen any way. This is the assumption of the Elder in the session. If the Elders assume the oncoming generations do not wish to hear then the Elders will not speak. This project seeks to dispel this assumption. With the use of research that speaks to the contrary as well as the directive of God to speak, the researcher believes that the Elders will give the oncoming generations another chance to listen. Dispelling the assumptions of the Elders is a key to the success of rebuilding the relationships between the two generations. At the same time it is hoped that the oncoming generations will be open to listening and discovery. The Elders and the oncoming generations of African Americans, whether they recognize it on the one hand or remember it on the other, share a common ancestry, a common origin, common struggles and to this day a common experience with institutionalized racism. For Nichols, in order to be listened to credibility is of the utmost importance. If a speaker lacks credibility it creates a bias in the listener. "Credibility is also influenced by whether you're viewed as being an appropriate position with a particular setting."[54]

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[53] Ibid., 38.

[54] Ibid., 77.

The Elder should possess credibility based on the fact that they have lived to the age that they have and successfully overcome the trials they have faced. While the hopelessness in the listener may cause them to initially reject what the Elder is saying, by building dialogue they should be able under most circumstances to build a relationship that allows the listener to open their hearts and minds to create a place of trust in the Elder and the testimony of the Elder that God is faithful and will help them as the Elder has been and continues to be helped throughout their lives. The Elders are speaking to the oncoming generations out of what Nichols calls in his epilogue 'enlightened self-interest'. The accounts of their lives that the Elders wish to present comes not only through an interest in themselves but because the Elders have taken an interest in others. "Concern for other people is an instinctive expression of the best part of us."[55] It is this 'best part' that the Elders wish to present.

The Prophetic Elder project, at its heart, is what Emma Justes calls a caring ministry. Justes relates a significant fact, "It is important to remember that in order to tell the story effectively, we need to know the person to whom we tell the story---to have some sense of where that person is on their faith journey."[56] A part of the vision for this project is to match a certain story to a particular need. If the story of an Elder's triumph over an adversity can be match with an individual or couple that is going through the same struggle in their lives, there is a strong likelihood that the initial meeting to listen to the story can turn in to a relationship that aids in building community. "In *every* area of ministry careful listening is a key to effective ministry."[57]

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[55] Ibid., 248.

[56] Emma J. Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xv.

[57] Ibid., xv.

Justes considers listening the prelude to preaching, it is also the prelude to the right application of the Prophetic Elders project in many circumstances, particularly in the one on one community relationships that the Elders are encouraged to make. "Hearing the people is the way they are known; their struggles, pains, and needs are revealed in listening to them."[58] Justes teaches about the Scriptural basis for hospitality which she argues is an important key to better listening. She emphasizes in her use of the three strangers arriving at Abraham's tent the need for the correct approach in communication, particularly communicating your intentions to an individual. In short, stand at a distance until acknowledged, wait for the host to extend permission to approach, enter the dwelling. The guest also offers the host something before leaving. This approach can be translated into an act of hospitable listening. "The roles tend to turn around guest-to-host and host-to-guest when we examine hospitality."[59] Hospitality, then, must be a core value of every ministry. Justes explains the core qualities of hospitality, ". . .vulnerability, humility, thoughtful availability, and reciprocity."[60] These are all wrapped up in, ". . . acts of welcoming and receiving, which are the essence of listening. When we indicate that we are willing to listen to someone, we have welcomed that person. When we listen and hear another person, we have received them."[61] The Prophetic Elder must listen. They cannot presume to have anything to say related to unless they have listened in both a vertical and horizoutal way, in the vertical with God and the horizontal with the people they encounter. In her epilogue, Justes reminds the reader that the church is a place for transformation and transformation, she writes, ". . . can lead to transgression--- transgression of boundaries that divide us in thought, faith, and action."

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[58] Ibid., xv.

[59] Ibid., 4.

[60] Ibid., 18.

[61] Ibid., 19.

Hospitality opens the door to listening and listening opens the door to powerful transformation. Justes affirms, "Listening has life-giving and life-discovering power. When a person is encouraged to speak and is heard deeply, that person can find their way."[62] Thus the Prophetic Elder and the listener to the Elder both benefit from the hospitable environment they will share. But what will inevitably be shared between both the Elder and the listener, are painful moments of life. Justes warns, "Many church communities are in pain . . . . The pain held by these churches is awaiting leadership that can truly welcome and receive people who suffer within the church." Prophetic Elders, as they grow and make their presence known, will be seen as leaders within the ministry. The researcher shares the same sentiment with Justes, Pastors as well as church leaders, ". . . who come with the essential characteristics of hospitality and listening brings to churches in pain the means for healing through the power of effective listening."[63] When the community notices that the Church is listening, the Church will become even more relevant and more importantly, trusted that it has good intentions toward the community as it shares the transformative love and power of Jesus Christ.

The oncoming generations are missing something, a key ingredient to life and only the Elders can truly show the way to find it. The pressures of life are very great on the oncoming generations and some are giving up hope. The answer to the question concerning the need for the conversation may lie in the interest that the "Buster" generation has in media, technology, gathering wealth, and material gain. "Busters" may be lacking something that the Elders have found after years of living and learning: a satisfied soul.

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[62] Ibid., 108.

[63] Ibid., 109.

Oncoming generations need to sit down for a *Mother to Son*[64] moment. In Langston Hughes'much celebrated poem, mother describes the stair of broken boards, splinters, and tacks she has had to climb. She knows it is tough but through it all she's been, "reachin' landin's, and turnin' corners." Mother tells son, "don't you turn back, don't you sit down on the steps 'cause you finds it kinder hard." There are those who are ready to give up because they find it hard and they find it hard because they are running after things that don't truly satisfy and they may have no one to listen to who will redirect and refocus their lives. Bell Hooks in her book *Rock My Soul* argues:

> Like our nation as a whole, black folks are in need of a spiritual revolution that will enable us to collectively reclaim a way of being in a world that allows us to honor ourselves, to value ourselves rightly. Choosing spiritual revolution, black folks would reclaim power of the soul.[65]

It is hoped that this project will add to the resources that will heal a fragmented body of believers and through stories and conversations will refocus and redirect an oncoming generation toward the creation of a satisfied soul through a closer walk with God.

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[64] Steven Barboza,ed. *The African American Book of Values*. (New York: Doubleday. 1998),339.

[65] Bell Hooks. *Rock My Soul*. (New York: Atria Books. 2003,), 218.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Biblical Foundations

The Old Testament scripture for this project is Genesis chapter 4 verses 3 through 7 and appears in the New Revised Standard Version as follows:

> [3] In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, [4] and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, [5] but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. [6] The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? [7] If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:3-7 [NRSV])

Biblical foundations seek the grounds on which to design a project which reflects the authority of the Scriptures. The Biblical foundations begin with this text because here the Lord Himself gives an example of intervention and correction that attempts to transform and mature Cain's walk of faith. God attempts to advise Cain by suggesting a course of action that will make his sacrifice acceptable. The text suggests that Cain's attitude as a worshipper, as opposed to his offering, was not acceptable. However, Cain's emotions have already risen to a fevered pitch. The anger and the fallen countenance are repeated in the lives of many people who do not possess the emotional and spiritual tools to overcome deep disappointments, especially if those disappointments are repeated. Hatred and envy, the sins lurking at the door, must be mastered or they can turn hurt and disappointment into ill-advised acts of retribution and vengeance.

Who better to start with as an example of an elder intervening in the life of the younger than the Lord? He is the Ancient of Days, "a designation of Yahweh found in Daniel7:9, 13, and 22. The expression in the original Aramaic יוֹם הַכְּפִרִים means literally 'one aged in days' and apparently described the Deity under the figure of an old man."[2] The Lord understands that Cain is the first born of man after the fall, the first born of those carrying a fallen nature with the determined inclination to sin. He speaks divine wisdom to Cain that is not accepted, but it is right nonetheless. The writer of Job makes this query, "Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:20) According to the writer in verse 23 of chapter 28, it is The Lord who knows the way to wisdom, and then answers, "And he said to humankind, 'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.' " (Job 28:28) The Lord was trying to help Cain see this truth.

A word study of key terms reveals the atmosphere of the text. There is great tension as the standing of Cain with the Lord and the state of his emotions rapidly deteriorates. It is appropriate to consider the name of the Lord at this point. Who is the Lord who is confronting Cain in this passage? According to the *New American Commentary's Excurses on the Revelation of the Divine Name,* the Lord in this instance is *Yahweh.* Yahweh is a revelation of divine power and character: goodness, mercy, and majesty. The name is associated with worship at altars. However, source criticism considers this account to have been written by the Yahwist historian who would have used this term. As the name of the Lord, Yahweh, was revealed to Moses and Israel at the giving of the Sinai Covenant and its use in the text is meant to clarify for the reader

[2] F. L. Cross, & E.A. Livingstone. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev.) (59). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

that the pre-patriarchal fathers worshipped the same God that was revealed at Sinai.[5] The word *regard* in 4:5 is translated from the Hebrew shaah (1043a); a prim. root; *to gaze*:—gaze away(1), had regard(1), had … regard(1), have regard(3), look(3), looked(1), pay … attention(1), turn your eyes(1), turn your gaze(2), turn your gaze away(1).[6] Therefore, in contrast to the Lord's reaction to Abel's offering, Cain's offering didn't even warrant a passing glance from the Lord. The usage implies that the Lord did not show favor to Cain. He paid no attention to Cain's worship at this altar. Cain himself may have been considered a child of promise for his parents. He was the first child of human parentage, brought forth from Eve with the help of the Lord after God had given a promise that one would come who would "strike the head" of the serpent who had beguiled Eve and caused so much grief. He may have been just fine as an only child but then Abel is born. Conflict arose as both fallen natures compete to get the upper hand. Here are two children, two youug boys who in the course of time will grow to be men. They are competitive, Cain perhaps more than Abel because while Cain is the first born Abel seems to find more favor. The phrase, in the course of time in verse 3, strikes a chord that speaks not only to the passage of time but that which had developed between the two brothers, a sibling rivalry that grew bitterer as time passed. Perhaps Cain, in bringing his best offering before the Lord, believed that with this act he could finally get one over on his brother.

By bringing an offering before the Lord with an attitude as poor as this, Cain is automatically rejected. An examination of the offering itself is also necessary. Genesis is a book of Moses, a book of the Law. Yet the account of Cain and Abel depicts a time before the Law, thus it depicts a time before the kinds and purposes of offerings were given.

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[5] Kenneth A. Matthews. *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1-11:26 Vol. 1A.*(Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers 1996).

[6] R.L Thomas. *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition.* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.1998).

An article from the *Westminster Theological Journal* entitled *Cain and His Offering* illuminates particulars about Cain's offering and why it was not accepted. B. K. Waltke argues, "the unusual element in the story from a lexical point of view is not that Cain's offering is bloodless but that Abel's is bloody!"[7] The word for offering in the text as found in the *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* is *minah*, meaning a gift or an offering[8]. The term is not specific therefore the offering would not have needed to be specific. The term could have been applied to a meat or grain offering. Waltke also writes, "if minah were either translated "gift" or "tribute" in Genesis 4:3-5, it would be clearer that the absence of blood from Cain's presentation on his altar did not disqualify him."[9] By bringing an offering before the Lord, Cain and Abel cannot be characterized simply as brothers; they are acting in a priestly capacity as well. By examining the qualifications of the priestly office, truth concerning Cain's rejection come to light. Leviticus 8 speaks of consecration through anointing and sin offerings made unto the Lord on their behalf. Indeed they were sovereignly chosen by the Lord for the office. The Lord in His sovereignty chose Abel, his offering notwithstanding.

As Waltke writes, "In this light, the statement in vv 4-5 that the LORD accepted one priest, Abel, and rejected the other, Cain, takes on new significance. Whereas the text explicitly characterizes Abel's offering, and more or less infers Cain's, it dwells on Cain's character, and more or less infers Abel's."[10]

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[7] B.K. Waltke, (1986). Cain and His Offering. *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 48 363-372.

R.L. Harris et al. (1980) *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, Chicago, Moody Press 1042.

[9] B.K. Waltke, (1986). Cain and His Offering. *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 48 363-372.

[10] Ibid.

The Psalmist in Psalm 24:4 describes those who can ascend the hill of the Lord as "those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully." (Psalm 24:4) The Lord made clear to Samuel that outward appearance was not the criteria that brought about the Lord's favor. He writes, "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) It is clear that Cain did not meet the test of heart.

When the Lord speaks to Cain it is not the offering that is in question, but Cain himself. Verse 5 of the text describes and outward expression that reveals Cain's inner condition. The Hebrew for the word countenance, *pâneh,* is used to describe the condition of and the expression on the face in different applications in the Hebrew Bible.[13] Paneh is used with emotions of anger and heaviness. God's counsel to Cain gives an opportunity for repentance and fellowship. Acceptance of the priesthood of Cain is what is at stake. Again, the terminology of the Levitical priesthood gives clarification.

For instance, from Leviticus 1:3, "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the LORD." Also from Leviticus 23:10, "you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall raise the sheaf before the LORD, that you may find acceptance." Cain was given a way to find acceptance before the Lord but in turn failed to accept the counsel the Lord gave him. So Cain did not master the sin that was lurking at the door of his heart. He was carried on by his emotions. This is an issue that has been faced by many who have no one to witness to them concerning the kind of gateway to sin that anger and

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[13] James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible.* Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2009.

heaviness of spirit and heart can open. Cain made the choice to let sin master him. If the Lord told Cain that he must master his sin, there must have been a way that Cain did not choose to overcome it.

Waltke concludes:

> Elsewhere Yahweh rejected the gifts of Korah (Num 16:15), Saul's men (1 Sam 26:19), and apostate Israel (Isa 1:13), not because of some blemish in their offering, but because of their deformed characters. Cain's flawed character led to his feigned worship. Had his mind been enlightened to understand his dependence upon the Creator, who fructified the ground, and the Redeemer, who atoned man's sin through Christ's blood, providing a basis for man's reconciliation to God, he would have offered not a token gift, but one from the heart, and along with Abel both he and his gift would have been pleasing to God.[16]

New Testament

The wisdom and counsel of God is unimaginably great. Paul proclaims, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"[17] This rich wisdom and knowledge that God has revealed to man through revelation and years life experiences was meant to be passed down from generation to generation. When telling his children to get wisdom, Solomon spoke, "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight." [18] Where is this wisdom and insight to be found? It is to be found in the community of believers. While Cain failed to act on the witness and counsel of God alone, the voices of those who have lived a life that shows progressive maturity of faith and the acquisition of wisdom from years of experience in life and with God

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[16] B.K. Waltke, (1986). Cain and His Offering. *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 48 363-372.

[17] Ro 11:33–34 (NRSV).

[18] Prov. 4:7 (NRSV).

should not be silent. The Psalmist writes in the 34th Psalm, "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. [19] Children in this text can mean any subject of instruction. Those with the prerequisite of mature faith can lead others to knowledge of God. Elders with life experience resulting in wisdom and understanding have the biblical example of calling others to know "the fear of the Lord."

In our present age there appears to be an absence of appropriate fear, awe, wonder, and respect of the Lord. Places, times, and days that were once held sacred in many communities are no longer respected as they once were. In the past the Elders held positions of honor and respect, but are revered less now more than ever. A pluralistic worldview is dominant with many while others nihilistically abandon restraint as well as faith. These views can explain in part the abandonment of connections to the community of faith. Once drawn to its message as well as its relationships, the extremes of culture have drawn some away and distracted others from joining altogether. And yet people are looking for answers to the troubles that affect homes and communities. They are looking for solutions to problems and healing for wounded souls and broken hearts. The commitment to family that once made extended families normal has eroded so much that Elders are much more isolated. New forms of media have made connections between generations problematic. Questions have been raised as to how to bridge the gaps in a community that was once tight knit and interdependent. What can bring them back together again? Where does the healing of our communities and families as well as our hearts and souls begin? Who can we look to for help?

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[19] Psalm 34:11–14 (NRSV).

The New Testament has an answer from the foundational scripture in Titus 2:1-8:

> But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance. Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us. [20]

The Christian community's shared values are reflected in their rules, beliefs, and culture. Each of these grows out of the teaching of sound doctrine by the leader/teacher of the community of faith. There is interchange in Paul's writing from Titus, to older men, to older women, to young women, to younger men then back to the teacher/leader. The foundational sound doctrine is the doctrine Titus was trained with under Paul. A community of faith had sprung up on the island of Crete, the setting of this letter and the context of Titus's ministry. Titus's work in Crete may meet with some challenges as Paul points out the shortcomings of groups that are in the body of believers. In Titus 1:10 those of the circumcision, which usually refers to a Jewish presence that Paul considers heretical, are described as rebellious, idle talkers, and deceivers who must be silenced. Paul describes in Titus 1:10-12 the personalities and moral failures of the people of the island. He goes so far as to give a quote from one described as one of their own prophets, "It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons." [21] The doctrinal fallacies and moral shortcomings of the believers and people of Crete are challenges to faith maturation in this church. Christ has come to the culture of the community of Crete and the Gospel of Christ is counter to the culture that exists there. Crete's reputation precedes it and comes into conflict with the imperatives of the gospel of grace.

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[20] Titus 2:1–8 (NRSV).

[21] Titus 1:12 (NRSV).

Paul points toward the goal of faith maturation in this letter in Titus 2:11-15 which is recognition of grace that leads to good deeds. A change of life-style and life focus is the appropriate response to receiving grace that leads to salvation. Jesus Christ gave himself for all men, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." [22] This new life-style and life focus is to be lived out while waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. Teaching this new way of life, this sound doctrine, is the strategy by which Titus would bring order to the Christian community there. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart in *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* note that sound doctrine in the original language is, "medical imagery for being healthy." [23] According to the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* the word used for 'sound' is Ὑγιής. Pronounced *hygies* it has the same root structure for the word hygiene in modern English. It can be used to describe wholeness and health as well as to be cured of sickness.[24] Jesus uses the same term in Mark 5:34 when telling the woman with the issue of blood to be healed of her disease. The word for 'doctrine' in Greek is διδασκαλία.[25] Pronounced *didaskalia* it means teaching or refers to what is taught. From these we can gather that Titus has the responsibility of providing 'healthy teaching'. Healthy teaching will lead to godly living exemplified by good deeds that are in contrast to the description that Paul gives of heretical, morally deficient, or immature believers. This 'healthy teaching' is supposed to change lives and impact the entire community of Crete and lead to spiritual growth.

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[22] Titus 2: 14 (NRSV).

[23]Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: a Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 385.

[24] Johannes P. Louw and Albert Eugene Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:Based on Semantic Domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 23.129.

[25]Ibid., 33.236.

Titus must encourage the believer and unbeliever alike to give up an unhealthy spiritual life-style for a healthy life-style that pleases God and builds relationships from person to person and from generation to generation. The teaching of the doctrine begins with Titus as it should for he is the teacher/leader of the Church on Crete. But Titus has been cleared to enlist help in this endeavor. This is why Paul left Titus on Crete to establish structure and appoint leaders. Paul describes the position of leadership in Titus 1:5-9 as being held by one who is beyond reproach, whose household has also accepted Christ, and who has been delivered from the from the vices and shortcomings of the unbelieving community. These leaders are also to have a sure understanding of the word of God for proclamation as well as for defense against those who do not believer. But the doctrine is then supposed to filter down throughout the community in very personal and practical ways through teaching by Elder members of the community to different sub-groups in the community. The reality is that the Christian community is supposed to encourage itself, look after itself, teach itself, and correct itself. The older man is among other things to be sound in faith while the older woman is to be reverent. The soundness of faith and reverence is not for themselves alone but to be shown to young men and young women as examples of what sound faith and reverence look like. Older believers are to uphold the creeds, codes, and culture of the community of faith and share their example with the younger men and women in the community. According to *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) the term πρεσβύτης, *presbytus*, (*presbytis* for an older woman) describes a man or woman from 49-56 years of age.[26] Likewise the term νεώτερος, *neoterous* (neos for a young woman) describes a male or female of a relatively young but unspecified age. The lack of specificity leaves room for the older to teach the younger across generations not to just one age range or group in particular.

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[26] Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (electronic ed.)* (Mich.: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1964), Strongs Greek # 4246.

This illustrates how stability of the faith and doctrines begins and is maintained in throughout Christian community. Paul writes specifically in verse 3, ". . . they are to teach what is good . . ." This entire phrase is embodied in the Greek term καλοδιδάσκαλος, *kalodidaskalos*, defined as, "one who teaches what is good and morally right."[27] The *TDNT* comments that this term is found nowhere outside of it usage here in the New Testament, making it a function unique in the Christian community. With καλο added as a prefix, the teaching of the *presbytis* takes on greater strength and urgency, as καλος is found used in other references from antiquity to mean, ". . . "sound", "powerful", "vigorous", "excellent"."[28] In other uses the term elevates meaning to a greater level of beauty, soundness, and moral excellence. The original reader and hearer of the letter may well have been not only greatly impressed but challenged to raise the character of their lives to such a level that so greatly contrasted with the description of their former lives in Cretan culture and society. Paul goes on to punctuate the call to higher living by writing in verse 4, " . . .so that they may encourage. . ." The term is σωφρονίζω, *sophronizo* in Greek. *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament* renders the term as a verb that means, ". . . *to make sane or sober minded; to recall a person to his senses;* hence, *to moderate, chasten, discipline.*"[29] The Elder upon observance of inappropriate behavior would act to intervene in the life of the younger to provide correction, direction, and support. The integrity of the Christian community was preserved as Elders called oncoming generations to conduct and lifestyles that would not

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[27] Johannes P. Louw and Albert Eugene Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:Based on Semantic Domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 33.249.

[28] Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (electronic ed.)* (Mich.: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1964), Strongs Greek # 2570.

[29] Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 4. Thessalonian Epistles.* (Nashville: Hendrickson, 1985), 341.

discredit the word of God. Old age is supposed to command not only respect but challenge those who hear their words and observe their lives to duplication of their sound faith.

Theological Foundations

It is clear that the body of Christ, the Church, is a unique creation of God in the world. This unique assembly, the *ecclesia*, has the unique mission in the earth of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, the present and coming power of the Kingdom of God, and through this proclamation to make disciples of Jesus Christ and teach. The people that make up the Church are a unique group. Scripture describes what believers are to strive for as they mature in the faith. An interesting text in Hebrews reads in part, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God."[30] The aim of teaching is to make disciples and the disciple should by all the means available grow in faith, wisdom, and power. But it seems that these disciples were slow to grow and were failing to mature and thus had superficial understanding. The expectation was that they were to mature so that they could move on to become teachers. It can be presumed that the Church should be a body of ever maturing believers who are able to pass on their understanding of the Word of God and can pass on through their testimony the understanding of how to apply the Word of God to daily living. Within the Church there should be found a group of mature disciples, the Elders, who have through years of faithful maturity have learned to put the Word of God into practice and should be able to teach oncoming generations how to do the same. The witness of the believers to oncoming generations can ensure that their wisdom is passed on so that those who sit at their feet can be further transformed which can lead to their own maturity.

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[30] *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version.* 1989 (Heb 5:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

The Elders are older members of the body of Christ who have long since made that declaration of faith and possess the wisdom of years of trusting God through all circumstances, whether abased or abounding. Elders have worked out a philosophy, and even a theology of life. By definition, philosophy is, "the attempt to organize and interpret the data of human experience in the light of some key category, central image, or organizing principle. . ."[31] The organizing principle for the Elder is that of Christian faith. Therefore an Elder has long since been changed through the effect of faith in the work of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. McGrath expresses Christ's work as, "transforming humanity and the entire cosmos, reshaping them and allowing them to share in the divine life."[32] According to the Christian hope all believers share in divine life yet each must mature in faith, a progressive work that can take years of growth.

Those that experience this project should have an encounter with God through the testimony/witness of the Elder to the member of the oncoming generation that is sitting at their feet. The oncoming generations have a standing question that is on their minds, that being "how shall we live?" The wisdom of the Elder can answer this question and that answer can speak from the perspective of moral theology. The Elder can also be a living example of the liberation God can bring to a people as well as an individual.

James Cone's classic work, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, elaborates on the liberation God provides for the Israelites. Cone illustrates that the liberation that God provides is directly related to a sovereign choice of a people or an individual. God does not set free only to enslave the chosen. They are set free to reveal God and be witnesses to what God has done for them. Therefore the Church is included with those who are called the people of God.

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[31] Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 5.

[32] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction*, 5th ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 315.

Cone argues that the Christian community is, "the community of the oppressed which joins Jesus Christ in his fight for the liberation of humankind."[33] Elders in the Black community have seen their fair share of oppression. But having believed in the resurrected Christ they enter an inheritance of hope in God. All generations seek hope. Therefore the Elders are well equipped to pass the inheritance of hope to oncoming generations. Part of the ground of Christian theology is that God is eminent. As such God does not pass by or stand far off from the hurting and oppressed. He is active in the acts of nations and in the lives of people. As this project limits its scope to a Black Christian community, Cone's definition of Black theology is appropriate. He writes, "Black theology merely tries to discern the activity of the Holy One in achieving the purpose of liberation of humankind from the forces of oppression."

Elders have endured humiliating oppression and yet they that have been transformed by their faith which has infused them a capacity to live in line with high ethical standards.

> "There is a right and there is a wrong. The difference between them is the concern of ethics. We seek a way to find the *right,* which is neither subjective nor arbitrary. We seek norms and principles that transcend prejudice or mere societal conventions. We seek an objective basis for our ethical standards. Ultimately we seek knowledge of the character of God, whose holiness is to be reflected and mirrored in our patterns of behavior."[34]

Younger generations always seem to seek for answers that are objective in nature. When faced with right and wrong and the consequences of each choice there is a need to hear from those who have faced the issues and navigated them successfully.

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[33] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fortieth Anniversary Edition.*(Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012), 3.

[34] R.C. Sproul, *Following Christ.* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996) ch.14 In Logos Bible Software 4.

Dr. Alvin Louis comments, "Older adults bring the gift of discernment to the learning environment. That gift becomes indispensible to the church as learners try to sort out truth from error and the essential from the trivial."[35] Louis also writes of the spiritual consciousness of older adults that gives them a, "mature posture of reverential strength and dignity."[36] Moral theology comes down to the decisions people make that impact both their vertical and horizontal relationships. The effort to continue in the favor of God and man is both reflective and consultative, looking inward considering what God has called us to personally be and become and looking outward, hearing direction from those who are in a position to guide and advise. In the course of introspection and dialogue, revelation concerning courses of action can take place. Living is a participatory act. All of us, by the decisions we make about what we speak and the actions we take affect the lives of those around us, making a ripple that shortly settles or a wave that has great impact on and shapes the lives we touch.

For this project, this moral compass is influenced by the context and experiences of African American believers. The pastoral ministry of New Living Stone Christian Church serves mainly those considered Elders. There are few below fifty and most are above sixty years old. The ministry seeks to teach and inspire a since of worth and purpose in these believers, ensuring them the example of their faithfulness through the years makes their presence even more important to the body of Christ and the world. Without question, the lives of these Elder believers have been shaped by their experiences in American culture and African-American culture, but also in the broader culture of the church in general and the African-American church subculture (for future references called the Black church) in particular.

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[35] Alvin Lewis, *Strategies For Teaching African American Adults* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc., 2006), 43.

[36] Ibid., 44.

Most of the parishioners are from the south, from Virginia through the Carolinas and Mississippi. These experiences form the core of a world view that has its roots in the experiences of Blacks in America. Mechal Sobel in her work *Trabelin' On: Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* describes in depth the origins of Black African world views and the changes that view underwent after being transported to the Americas and exposed to White Baptist Christianity. Because of the African-American lineage of the congregation one cannot help but begin with the African Diaspora and the transportation and reformation of the cosmology and world view of African people in that experience. The inner core of every world view is known as the sacred cosmos. Each people group in West Africa had a different understanding of the universe's structure and function.

According to Sobel, "West African slaves in America early melded their various cosmos into a single one."[37] Different groups of Africans were brought to the Americas with a different view of what was sacred and the origins of themselves and all that exists. It was the Elder in African society that that was the keeper of not only histories but of the explanation of the sacred. An account of the Dogon Elder Ogotemmeli in Sobel's writing reveals his knowledge of the sacred cosmos of the Dogon in symbols of Dogon society. "Ogotemmeli revealed a system of astronomy, calendrical measurements, a formal pharmacopoeia, as well as extensive anatomical and physiological knowledge. Above all, he revealed the sacred heart of the Dogon world view." [38] This sacred heart of the Dogon was a life force called the high god Amma symbolized as water but also known as "the word." While giving his accounts Ogotemmeli also consulted other Elders for accuracy when he was unclear.

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[37] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: the Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 5.

[38] Ibid., 6, 7.

It is interesting to note that the Dogon sacred cosmos contains the symbolism of water and word as does the Christian faith.

As Africans came to the Americas and were converted by White Christians of different denominations their sacred cosmos mixed with Christian theology. This fusing led to the birth of the Black Church in its many forms and expressions. Still there was always the presence of an Elder to pass on the answers to the questions of oncoming generations concerning how they should live in their present age and under their present circumstances. Truly the Black Church is founded on the solid foundation of Christian theology. Yet the Black Church's expressions of itself, particularly the passing of traditions by Elders, are rightly attributed to African origins. The Black Church is called to be the Church in its worship and its witness of the Gospel to the world but also to its own unique community. The evangelizing and conversion of slaves who mixed their understanding of the sacred and the rhythms of their former culture with Christian theology resulted in the Black Church.

Alfloyd Butler has written on *The Africanization of American Christianity* in which he asserts that, ". . . Christianity was itself Africanized between 1740 and 1790 by blacks imparting to it an ecstatic character, inherent in Christianity because of the Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but inhibited in its colonial American version until the Africans gave it release in their African modes of religious response."[39] Other observers of this phenomenon have noted that Christianity did not have to travel through a diaspora in order to take root and adapt to African modes of expression. Darren Middleton's article *Jesus of Nazareth in Ghana's Deep Forest: The Africanization of Christianity in Madam Afua Kuma's Poetry* speaks to the infusion of African expression into the acceptance of Christian faith and practice. This article affirms the appropriateness of finding expression of the truths of Christianity through the culture of a

[39] Alfloyd Butler, *The Africanization of American Christianity* (New York: Carlton Press, 1980), 142.

believing people. The author specifically examines the African Independent Church movement. In this movement, ". . . [C]hurches are less formal, often revolve around 'prophet healers' . . . . use many spoken and few written expressions of faith, are spontaneous, and overall reflect a more grassroots understanding of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[40] Madam Afua Kuma's poetry is illustrative of this movement because her work was first spoken, following the oral tradition of the Akan or Ashanti people. Middleton describes her work as a demonstration of , "oral, everyday African narrative theology."[41] Kuma's work is further described as an expression of, ". . . the Christian gospel against and African, more specifically Ghanaian cultural background, and accentuates African traditions while remaining loyal to the Gospels."[42] The poet's expressions are extremely faithful to Christ's life and ministry and parallel his 'I am' statements. For example one verse describes Christ as, ". . . the fertile forest land/ on which farmers labor, cutlasses in hand."[43] An example of her indigenization is this verse:

> You Jesus take a single grain of corn, grind it, roast it, and then go and plant it and, look! Now the grain has born fruit and filled two hundred bags, with some left over! Farmer, who generously gives to all in need. Farmer, who slays hunger, only in you will we be satisfied.[44]

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[40] Darren J.N. Middleton, "Jesus of Nazareth in Ghana's Deep Forest: The Africanization of Christianity in Madam Afua Kuma's Poetry". *"Religious & the Arts"* no 1/2 2005, p 116-134.

[41] Ibid., 118.

[42] Ibid., 118.

[43] Ibid., 119.

[44] Ibid., 119, 120.

Middleton concludes, "As with other traditional cultures, most African languages have no word for religion. The spiritual suffuses the African's everyday world so that the Western compartmentalization that defines "religion" simply does not hold in African societies and culture."[45] Africans whether present on the continent or in the diaspora have always adapted Christianity to not only their worldview, but have found ways to express the faith within their own oral tradition, thus creating an effective narrative theology.

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[45] Ibid., 129.

[46] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: the Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 5.

"Ogotemmeli revealed a system of astronomy, calendrical measurements, a formal pharmacopoeia, as well as extensive anatomical and physiological knowledge. Above all, he revealed the sacred heart of the Dogon world view."[47] This sacred heart of the Dogon was a life force called the high god Amma symbolized as water but also known as "the word." While giving his accounts Ogotemmeli also consulted other Elders for accuracy when he was unclear. It is interesting to note that the Dogon sacred cosmos contains symbolism in water and word as the Christian faith feature prominently the water and the word in its own theology.

John S. Mbiti in his *African Religions and Philosophy* expounds on the complex nature of African spirituality that is the foundation of African American Christianity. While there are some differences and failures perceived by Mbiti of Christianity to satisfy the core traditional spiritual needs of Africans, many similarities and parallels abound. The philosophical systems of African belief are found, ". . . in the religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics and morals of the society concerned."[48] The Dogon mentioned previously are only one of many people groups in Africa in general, West Africa in particular. The Dogon system would be different than the system of another people group. But religion, as Mbiti writes, ". . . permeates all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the sacred and secular, between the spiritual and the material areas of life."[49] Religion, community and ritual all go hand in hand. It is impossible to be separated from it as a member of an African people group at any time. This pattern can still be found in many bastions of the African American community of faith where the presence and blessing of God is requested

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[47] Ibid., 6, 7.

[48] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990), 2.

[49] Ibid., 2.

not just in formal church settings but in the everyday walk of life of the faithful. To be without religion, says Mbiti, ". . . amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion."[50] Edward Wimberly speaks of persons becoming relational refugees as a result of some form of oppression. But for the African it is modern change that causes alienation and sense of detachment. Because religion so permeates their lives, any move toward modernization that supersedes the traditions disrupts the religious foundation of the community. "They are torn between the life of their forefathers which, whatever else might be said about it, has historical roots and firm traditions, and the life of our technological age which, as yet, for many Africans has not concrete form or depth."[51] Surely it was meant to be like this for the Christian. Christ illustrated many times that following him would mean forsaking other relationships to make God's will the believers first priority. But Mbiti levels this criticism that, "In these circumstances Christianity and Islam do not seem to remove the sense of frustration and uprootedness. It is not enough to learn and embrace a faith which is active once a week, either on Sunday or Friday, while the rest of the week is virtually empty."[52] For Africans, to be rooted and grounded in faith is to live it moment by moment. The researcher would argue that this is also the goal of Christianity and that Mbiti's criticism may be a bit over simplified as his perception of Christianity and Islam has constrained the practice of these faiths to holy or sanctified days versus the mandates in each faith to live them out as a daily walk. Mbiti levels another critical comparison that African beliefs and practices are written in the heart as opposed to recited or found in sacred scripture. Yet the faith of Christians is both written in the heart and codified in expressions of faith found in the various creeds of the Church.

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[50] Ibid., 2.

[51] Ibid., 3.

[52] Ibid., 3

Mbiti writes a myriad of descriptors that he believes are unique to African religious tradition: belief that resides in the heart, the significance of ritual, the various types of religious leadership, and he continues to stress the abiding of religion in the individual versus for instance a building or the confining of the practice to a certain day. He concludes, "So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated: they belong to a single whole."[53]

While diverse, Mbiti has identified a continuum of beliefs that are connected throughout the continent. God is eternal and omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. "These are essential aspects of His being, they are a part of his unique nature and no other being can be described in the same terms."[54] Man's limits are acknowledged while God is unlimited and absolute. Mbiti provides descriptions of God's presence as described by various peoples. "One name for Him among the Barundi is 'the Watcher of everything' . . . . the Illa say that His 'ears are long'."[55] The Yoruba have this saying of duties or challenges, ". . . they are easy to do as that which God performs; difficult to do as that which God enables not'.[56] This idea of the 'almighty God' is certainly preserved in the Christian theology of African Americans. Likewise the belief in the transcendence and immanence of God is also present. The Akan praise God as, "He who is there now as from ancient times,"[57] equating the Old Testament descriptions of God as the 'ancient of days' and being 'from old, from everlasting'.

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[53] Ibid., 4.

[54] Ibid., 30.

[55] Ibid., 31.

[56] Ibid., 31

[57] Ibid., 32.

In the Zulu concept of God, "[T]hey give one name to God which means: 'He Who is of Himself' or 'He Who came of Himself into being'.[58] This perfectly equates God's answer to Moses about his identity as 'I Am that I Am'. Mbiti summarizes, "So God confronts men as mysterious and iucomprehensible, as indescribable and beyond human vocabulary. This is part of the essential nature of God."[59] So African American Christianity most certainly retains the impressions and parallels of the many diverse belief systems of many African peoples. Considering the depth of connection between religion and community among African peoples it is no wonder that the African diaspora and the trans-Atlantic crossing caused such deep trauma to all who endured it.

Peter Paris in his *Spirituality of African Peoples* makes the claim that there is, ". . . a plausible argument in support of the claim that African spirituality . . . . was preserved in recognizable form among the North American diaspora."[60] The claim has merit in that, while the expressions of a people will change due to time and circumstance, it is also true that spirituality and spiritual concepts that are deeply held can be transformed to fit new places and new ways of living like those that confronted Africans that were brought to the European colonies in North America and the Caribbean. While challenges to community wholeness and spiritual well-being are rampant today, African Americans do retain the concepts of community and traditions, consciously or unconsciously, that are paralleled among African peoples. Paris's arguments concerning the search for a moral life among African Americans is closely related to this project in that hearing the prophetic voice calls a struggling community back to the direction of its moral

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[58] Ibid., 33.

[59] Ibid., 35.

[60] Peter Paris. *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1995.), 129.

compass that is inherently African in origin, adapted in tension with Euro-American moral concepts, and struggles to remain rooted in spite of the many moral conflicts within the African American community. Paris appeals to Mbiti's arguments when he claims, ". . . the realm of the spirit is integrally related to both the historical and natural realms of existence . . . . the integral relation of the realm of spirit with that of history is seen most vividly in the African conception of life, which, incidently, differs markedly from Western understandings."[61] For example, to African people the ancestors are always present. Death as an entrance into eternal life is seen as breaking the bonds of earth to another form of existence that parallels the life they lived in the temporal world. But more importantly the ancestor lives through the historical memory of those who carry on in the temporal world. Paris explains, "The ancestral relationship continues for as long as there are persons alive who knew the person in the flesh."[62] Thus community extends into the spiritual world. The stability of community is paramount to life in both the temporal and spiritual. This stability is maintained through the harmonious fulfillment of moral obligations to family and community. The Prophetic Elder can be the voice that calls the community back to these moral obligations. It is understood, however, that failure to fulfill these obligations ultimately results in great instability in both families and communities, instability that is having a profound impact on the spiritual and temporal institutions of the African American community in the present day. When the community fails to fulfill its obligations to the rituals that preserve ancestral memory social stability collapses.

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[61] Ibid., 52.

[62] Ibid., 53.

Paris affirms, "The rituals of story-telling, ceremonial celebrations, ritual performances, sacrificial offerings, daily devotion, and the like all presuppose the presence of a social order even as they contribute to its preservation and enhancement."[63] Paris stresses the necessity of the preservation of moral norms and traditions. "As social cohesion and social order increased among freed African American peoples, their leaders exemplified moral norms and traditions . . . . that had been preserved through slavery in modified form."[64] If the leaders of the present, i.e. Elders, are the keepers of moral norms and traditions, then their silence has contributed to the present moral and community instability, creating discontinuity with hundreds of years of moral tradition. The Elders as keepers of moral tradition have a responsibility to be vocal in confronting what amount to be violations of the social norms that are a necessity to African American morality and spirituality. It is traditional that the leaders of the community that keep the traditions and moral norms of the community are celebrated. "They were destined to be immortalized in the community's oral and literary traditions . . . . and the evidence of their spiritual efficacy was seen in the continuing effectiveness of their practical wisdom."[65] African Americans are African peoples that have been impacted greatly by the trauma of slavery. Paris laments, "The devastating experience of slavery indelibly bruised the consciousness of Africans throughout the diaspora."[66] The researcher has found that community is an all important source of life, health, and stability in the sources he has consulted. The project encourages the rebuilding of community through the faith narratives of a generation that still had a strong connection to these social and moral ideals that are inherently African in origin.

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[63] Ibid., 57.

[64] Ibid., 57.

[65] Ibid., 58.

[66] Ibid., 89.

Paris argues for the preservation of several key moral and social ideals related to this project, ". . . deep respect for the practical wisdom of the elderly, the power of the elderly to bless and curse, unquestioned obedience to the authority of parents and elderly."[67] For Paris, traditional African consciousness remained even if specific memories of home did not. The ". . . old tribal memory of African slaves grew dimmer . . . . the structure of traditional consciousness did not perish."[68] Of the new communities that came into being through the struggle of the diaspora he writes, ". . . Africans constructed new systems of cultural value, religious meaning, and moral significance that constituted and amalgam of Euro-American forms and African meanings."[69]

It has been argued and become extensively accepted that the effects of the trauma of the African diaspora and the shame of enslavement have been passed from the first generations of enslaved Africans in the Americas up to the present day. Gilda Graff in her article *The Name of the Game is Shame* adds her voice to the field. Graff's study began with the observance of the words that became the title of her article on the wall of a building in a ghetto neighborhood. While treating a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust, Graff made hypothesized her own connection between trauma and shame and the impact of slavery on African Americans. Graff cites one definitions of shame, ". . . a feeling that arises when we are convinced that something about ourselves is wrong, inferior, flawed, weak or dirty . . . . as if we are a mistake . . . . shame is an identity."[70] The entire process of capture, transport, and enslavement ultimately led to trauma and shame.

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[67] Ibid., 90.

[68] Ibid., 74.

[69] Ibid., 75.

[70] Gilda Graff. "The Name of the Game is Shame: The Effects of Slavery and its Aftermath". *Journal of Psychohistory* 39 no. 2 (October 1, 2011). 133-144.

Graff explains quoting Bloomberg that, "In the face of trauma, the potential collapse of selfhood, the mind falls on the ultimate safety measure, the ability to wifhdraw consciousness from certain aspects of immediate experience while enhancing other aspects. In other words the mind uses pathological dissociation----the hypnoidal unlinking of incoinpatible patterns of experience."[71] Slavery, writes Graff, is not covered in literature on trauma treatment, while other existence of a Holocaust Museum in the United States to memorialize and heal victims of a trauma that occurred half-way around fhe world and the absence of a permanent memorial and place of healing for generations of African Americans who are the descendants of slaves in their very own country is not lost on her. Graff also acknowledges that unlike the ending of the Holocaust that came with liberation of concentration camps and the end of World War II, the trauma endured by African Americans did not end with slavery, it continued through Jim Crow, years of lynching and a legalized "separate but equal" status. Graff recognizes another layer of shame endured by African Americans as, "These events were generated by a belief system that defined a people not only as inferior but less than human."[72] Graff quotes L.F. Litwark from the 2009 work, *How Free Is Free?: The Long Death of Jim Crow*:

> This is not an easy history to absorb. The images and details can numb the mind, deaden the senses:they tax our sense of who we are and who we have been. No wonder lynchings occupy such a small place in our literature and textbooks. The omission has been called a "double lynching" because is also murdered any memory of the crime.[73]

Graff also includes Litwark's coverage of the failure of black service in World War I to change the conditions of injustice upon return to the United States, conditions that cause some black soldiers to choose to remain in France after the war.

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[71] Ibid., 135.

[72] Ibid.,136.

[73] Ibid.,136.

Litwark also included the account of German prisoners of war being served in the south as black G.I.'s looked on after being told "we don't serve colored folks here". Bringing the trauma, shame and inequality forward, Graff cites statistics that show by the year 2007 blacks accounted for nearly 50 percent of the nation's prisoners and that while 76 percent of illicit drug users in 1992 were white, more arrests of blacks were made. Therefore, not only has the trauma and shame of slavery continued, but it's aftermath in the form of dysfunction, destroyed lives and death has yet to cease. This has forged a link in the psychological chain that internalizes the belief that it is better to assimilate the features and other identifying marks of the oppressor. Graff recounts Toni Morrison's 1970 work *The Bluest Eye* in which, ". . . an African-American girl who wishes for blue eyes, is the victim of inter and intraracial shaming, and is traumatized by her physically abusive mother and sexually abusive father."[74] This is clearly an example of the oppressed becoming oppressors even to the level of becoming an oppressor to one of their own. But it is the combined racism and self hatred that causes the child loath her features to the point of seeking a way to change the color of her eyes. What Graff has concluded is that in the age of the first President of the United States of African American descent, the trauma and shame of slavery is in what amounts to be full blown denial on both sides of the issue. ". . . whites have dissociated the historical position of the oppressor from collective consciousness due to our inability to tolerate and identification with the aggressor."[75] One side desires to disavow involvement in the history based on being the cause of it while the other side wishes to disavow involvement due to being the victims of it.

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[74] Ibid., 139.

[75] Ibid., 139.

Apparently psychotherapists have had an awakening to the need for treatment as Graff explains, "The importance of shame, of trauma, and of the legacy of slavery in the treatment of black patients is beginning to be understood."[76] The impact is seen and felt in impoverished communities, failures in effective parenting and early childhood development, and in what has been described as a deep pain which can manifest itself in anger that black males feel, but is hard to explain. The researcher recognizes that those being called to Prophetic Eldership are also those who experienced the brunt of the continuation of the legacy of Jim Crow and separate but equal, yet also lived to see some light of hope with the passing of Civil Rights legislation, integration, and a more level playing field for their children than they had. But what stands out is that while the Elders of the silent generation endured the hardships brought on by the legacy of slavery, the way they endured these hardships was through steadfast faith and the support of a community united in the same struggles. The message of the Prophetic Elder to the oncoming generations is still the same, that in spite of painful and disorientating experiences individually and collectively, they survived because their faith in God prevailed, and continues to prevail.

As Africans came to the Americas and were converted by White Christians of different denominations, not only did their sacred cosmos mix with Christian theology, their stories were also reshaped by a new place under new circumstances. Story telling as cultural and social practice among African Americans is rooted in African traditions. According to Tempii Champion in *Understanding Storytelling Among African American Children: A Journey from Africa to America,* "The art of storytelling was used both to teach and to comfort members of the community. Storytelling helped to preserve history----- of one's self, one's family, and one's

[76] Ibid., 140.

ethnic group."[77] Through the African diaspora a new language, English, was incorporated into the culture of the African people groups brought to the Americas. "Africans took the language forced on them and interwove patterns of their native languages with this new language."[78] The Africans had to adapt stories to suit the places where they found themselves enslaved, and through slavery, Jim Crow, and the present day, storytelling has been a part of the preservation and perseverance of African American life that both instructs and entertains. This fusing led to the birth of the Black Church in its many forms and expressions. Still there was always the presence of an Elder to pass on the answers to the questions of oncoming generations concerning how they should live in their present age and under their present circumstances. Isadore Opekwho, Distinguished Professor at Birmingham University is a collector of stories from those he calls narrators from different people groups throughout the Continent. In his article *Storytelling in the African World*, he writes that traditional African storytelling contributes, ". . . to our sense of ourselves as a race within the human community."[79] These are no mere stories that one can hear in passing and simply turn away. These stories embody the creeds, codes, and culture of a people. They contain the treasury of community values. When the story begins all in the storyteller's presence drop what they are doing and hang on every word not only out of respect for the one telling the story but to engage in learning a life lesson that is told in a memorable and easily applicable way. Opekwho rightly condemns the prejudicial notion that Africans, so called primitive in the eyes of ignorant and invasive cultures, did not have the

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[77] Tempii B. Champion. *Understanding Storytelling Among African American Children: A Journey From Africa to America.* (Mahwah, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2003.), 3.

[78] Ibid., 3.

[79] Isadore Okpewho. Storytelling in the African World. *Journal of the African Literature Association* 3 no. 2, (Summer/Fall 2009) 110-122. http://www.africanlit.org/publications/jala/Vol3No2/okpewho.pdf (accessed April 2, 2013)

intelligence or the ability to cultivate the skills necessary to weave together the intricacies found in these stories. Not everyone was so privileged to be able to attain to the status of a skilled storyteller in the village community. Opekwho informs the reader that, "But we know today that to be able to tell stories there were two different kinds of training: either you formed the habit of hanging around people with proven skills in the art, which would equip you with a modest level of competence, or you underwent a period of training under a professional expert in a specialized form of storytelling."[80] Becoming an expert enabled the storyteller to perform the most important function of admonishing and prompting particular people or groups to rise to their appropriate station and role in the life of the community. Stories challenged the manhood of men in the community. "Most heroes we know in the African oral tradition are, however, men who put their personal endowments---- which are usually superhuman---- to the service of their community in times of trial."[81] The best of characters in these stories are the ones that did their exploits for the good of all. Truly the Black Church is founded on the solid foundation of Christian theology. Yet the Black Church's expressions of itself, particularly the passing of traditions by Elders, are rightly attributed to African origins. Opekwho cites stories with similarities not only across the African continent but are similar to the creation stories in Genesis. "Beyond stories with any basis in history, there are numerous stories told in Africa that endeavor to ponder the facts of human life, sometimes in naturalistic and sometimes in metaphysical terms."[82] The story is told of the creator Woyengi (our mother) of the Ijo people of the Niger Delta. Woyengi creates human beings from mud, but unlike Yahweh, asks what humans would like to be as opposed to preordaining their purpose.

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[80] Ibid., 111.

[81] Ibid., 115.

[82] Ibid., 114.

The most obvious difference being that the African concept is founded on a matriarchal imagery versus the patriarchal imagery of the Judeo-Christian God. Woyengi's intervention in the affairs of human beings is Deistic in nature as she is depicted as a creator that completes the work and steps back to let things play out as they will. Characters must fight their way back to her then challenge her in order to get the change they desire. There is no mediator or savior, and the created human must return to earth in hiding for fear retaliation, having lost the challenge. The Black Church is called to be the Church in its worship and its witness of the Gospel to the world but also to its own unique community. The evangelizing and conversion of slaves who mixed their understanding of the sacred and the rhythms of their former culture with Christian theology resulted in the Black Church. Reaching resolution to various issues of life is also quite different than the Judeo-Christian experience. As opposed to a revelation, command or vision from God, the resolution to the story is left in the hands of the hearer. This is reflected in what Opekwho calls "dilemma" narratives. Instead of clear direction, ". . . traditional performances of such a tale usually end with the narrator instigating a lively controversy among the audience."[83] Adaptation of stories to a new place was a direct result of the transatlantic slave trade. "The more interesting thing about these tails is that in adjusting to life in western Atlantic societies, they had to adopt strategies of survival imposed on them by contingent social forces."[84] Opekwho describes these stories as "afro-diasporic", accounting for the western influences combines with components original to the story. One of these stories is of an argument between a cat and a dog about man's existence after death. The cat argues that mankind dies at the end of his life. The dog argues that when mankind dies, they can live again. The original story is one of a dog and a chameleon.

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[83] Ibid., 116.

[84] Ibid., 116

In the original the dog is granted his appeal for immortality, but is too slow in delivering the news. Chameleon's presence with the same question makes god angry, therefore man is denied his request for immortality. In the transatlantic version, dog is too slow again, distracted by savory bones put in his path by the cat. In the end it is determined that when mankind dies, that is the end of life. This is the opposite of course of the Judeo-Christian belief in the resurrection of mankind for judgment before God. But the adaptation also reflects a new sentiment.

Opekwho points out the differences between the two, "While the African tale attempts a plain, naturalistic inquiry into a common human fate, it's diasporic variants have been influenced by the competitive atmosphere of the slave society in which they grew."[85] While adjustments have been made for time and space, the oral narrative remains an important remnant of African culture throughout the Atlantic world where descendants of African people are present. The foundational purpose for these oral narratives remains, to not only entertain but to teach fundamentals of life and the creeds, codes and beliefs most valued by a community.

Out of the African Diaspora came a deep Han, a woundedness that to this day casts a pall over America in general and Black people in particular who have carried as well as passed on the wounds and pain of the culture from generation to generation. The growth of America on the backs of the oppressed, the displacement of Native Americans from their lands, years of Jim Crow laws and stereotyping, and the abuse and rejection of various immigrant people have perpetuated this pain throughout the land. In African Americans, pain exists and impacts the entire the community and that pain has been comforted and sometimes healed, through the worship and ministry of the Black Church.

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[85] Ibid., 117

The pain of wounds manifests itself in ways that are legion. The ways that individuals have tried to cope with and cover up the wounds and pain are legion as well. The wounds and pain are present in both the oppressed and the oppressor of our society. This deep woundedness, this Han, is present in both the society and in the individual. Han is a Korean term used, "to describe the deep wound of victims."[86] It is categorized according to Dr. Andrew Sung Park as boxed in hope, a feeling of anguish, and, "a rupture of the soul caused by abuse, exploitation, injustice, and violence."[87] Continued abuse and wounding only drives the pain deeper into the soul. A wounded and pain-filled creation is the polar opposite of the will of God in creation in general and in the creation of human-kind in particular. In McGrath's *Christian Theology*, he cites a description of human-kind as given by the early church fathers. Origen writes of the human-kind, ". . . in his first creation man received the dignity of the image of God. . ."[88] Tertullian takes this approach, ". . .he had originally been "in his image." The state of being "in the image of God" relates to his eternity: for humanity receives back that Spirit of God which at the beginning was received from God's inbreathing, but which was afterwards lost through falling away."[89] Athanasius, "taught that God created human beings in the "image of God," thus endowing humanity with a capacity which was granted to no other creature- that of being able to relate to and partake in the life of God."[90] This life of God is a life without wounds and without pain. Human-kind was closest in relationship relation to God at this point. But with the free-will decision to turn away from God human-kind lost that relationship and fellowship with God and

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[86] Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: a Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 10.

[87] Ibid., 11, 12.

[88] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction*, 5th ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 349.

[89] Ibid., 349.

[90] Ibid., 349.

in turn also became hostile and oppressive to one another. Human-kind lost sight of the God given mandates of fruitfulness and dominion together as one. Sin caused conflict between human-kind, first highlighted in the Genesis account of Cain and Abel. Cain is rejected by God and that rejection causes a wound, a wound that God warns must be handled appropriately or the sin that is waiting to ambush him will overtake him. Cain fails to heed God's warning and subsequently kills his brother. In this, Cain's wound becomes the root of sin. All of human-kind on some level have experienced this same cycle of being wounded, poorly handling the impact of those wounds, and committing sin out of the pain of those wounds. God's intervention and warning to Cain, though it went unheeded, was quite appropriate and this project seeks to bring this kind of intervention to bear as a way to re-direct the choices of people who are possibly reacting to and acting on the presence of deep Han in their souls. The African American community and the Black Church are in need of this intervention as well. African Americans have reacted to their wounds in terribly hurtful ways at great cost to the community through murders, imprisonment, and broken families. Hearing a positive testimony from an Elder in the church infused with direction and hope can plant seeds that make a difference in the lives of oncoming generations that seek answers to their wounds and internal conflict. All must be mindful that there are wounds and pain that are not related to sins committed or omitted. Dr. Park points out that the three friends of Job actually afflicted him with their theology of retribution. "They forced an innocent victim to repent of his sin and be saved. Job needed comfort and healing from the Han of great tragedies, but they demanded his immediate confession of sin."[91] Wounded people have been confronted with the "sin-repentance" formula of preaching and testimony for years all without taking into account the deep woundedness of

[91] Park, *From Hurt to Healing: a Theology of the Wounded*, 20.

victims. It is a theology described by Dr. Park as being under God's wrath. When an Elder gives of their witness and wisdom they must keep in mind that while sin may be present, evil may well have impacted the life of the hearer and no sin may have been involved. In some instances, only oppression that wounds and brings about pain that could in turn lead to sins of commission and omission. This silent generation of Elders in the Church is called to speak out of their depth of wisdom into an oncoming generation's crisis of life and faith.

According to Alan Jacobs all Christian lives take on a narrative dimension. He writes, "Each of us does indeed has a unique personal narrative, one whose essential shape is not always easily discerned."[92] Because of this difficulty of discernment narrative theology comes into play as a way of organizing thoughts, feelings, and events. Historically, writing diaries was a way for Christians to keep track of their perseverance in the faith in the 17th Century. The Puritan's as well were said to have journaled in order to observe and reflect upon God's activity in their lives. Jacobs also quotes Jewish historical critic Walter Benjamin, ". . . every real story contains something useful. In one case, it could be moral, in another practical advice, in a third a proverb or maxim."[93] Counsel, he writes, woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom and the sharing of wisdom through story telling is dying out because wisdom is dying out. Wisdom gained in the course of life passes away when those who carry it within them pass away. An African proverb says that when an Elder dies, a library dies with them. The narrative of an Elder's life that has been lived for God is full of theology, the ideas of how God has been active in the Elder's life. There is an understanding of life that allows them to build a narrative through reflection.

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[92] Alan Jacobs, *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 4.

[93] Ibid., 8.

Jacobs quotes Soren Kierkegaard, "life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets that it must be lived forwards."[94] An Elder's testimony can assist the oncoming generations with forward living.

In *We Have Been Believers*, James H. Evans stresses the necessity of a narrative theology for African-Americans that tells the Black religious story with a two-fold purpose. First, "The Black religious story provides opportunities for people to break out of their ideological prisons and to see that the roles of the oppressed and oppressors are not the ultimate categories of human existence."[95] Black theology like Park's work on the wounded and oppressed also concerns itself with both the oppressed and their oppressors. What is clear from daily experience and from Sunday to Sunday is that this turn toward truth that Evans says is the goal of the Black religious story has been a slow turn indeed as African Americans and even people of color everywhere still have trouble finding common spiritual ground. It does not yet appear that the story has been clearly told nor does it seem that the theological stories of other people that are shaped through different readings of a text from perspectives that come from different, individual contexts has been accepted fully. [96] But as Evans points out, "No theology is "acultural" or value free. African American theology is expressed in the symbols and reflects the values of African-American culture." [97] Though the story must be told beginning with the people for whom the story will have the most meaning, the liberating qualities of the Black theological story must be made

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[94] Ibid., 5.

[95] James H. Evans, Jr, *We Have Been Believers: an African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993), 26.

[96] Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: a Reevaluation* (Louisville,: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 28.

[97] James H. Evans, Jr, *We Have Been Believers: an African-American Systematic Theology* , 28.

available to all people. Commenting on Black theology Evans writes, "Black theology must contribnte to the liberation of people from the false stories that enslave them; it must be critical narrative." [98]

He goes on to write of the transformative nature of the Black story. It seems to parallel Peter's preaching at Pentecost. Peter preached the Good News of Jesus Christ, sinner's hearts were convicted and they believed and were converted. Evans is hopeful for a *metanoia* from other cultures, "Finally, what may happen is that hearing another story can force us to tell our own story in a different way, transformed to such a degree that we can properly call the experience one of conversion."[99] But this conversion is not just for other cultures it is for the oncoming generations of African Americans who share the same teleological end as their fore-parents. The story of the Black Church is a story of continuous moving forward from, "the false stories that enslave them."[100] Concerning narrative in African-American theology, Evans expresses that narrative terms are essential to the African American theological process. Passing on wisdom in African American circles has been done through oral tradition. But the tradition is grounded in the Bible, "the primary document of the Christian faith…"[101] Because they were enslaved when introduced to the Bible, themes of liberation became a part of the hope engrained in the African American story. Evans presents a caution in the telling of an African American story that is wrapped in themes of liberation and hope, "It is important to state that it is a *source* of the truth but not the truth itself."[102]

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[98] Ibid., 26.

[99] Ibid., 26.

[100] Ibid., 26.

[101] Ibid., 27.

[102] Ibid., 27

The storyteller, the witness to the truth, must take the story back to its epistemological roots. The knowledge came through the Word of God and was understood through the Holy Spirit, yet finding out that the Word was true did not occur through revelation only, but in the African American experience confirming God's word as truth must come through experiencing the result of applied faith. The African American faith is a faith based on facts and experience. This reinforces the prophetic posture that can be taken by preacher and Elder alike in the Black Church. The African American preaching tradition has a history of prophetic power. Again, it suggests the answer to the moral theological question of how shall we live is that they shall live as unto the Lord, a life pleasing to God. The Elder has found through years of faith experience, trying God, proving God, and trusting God that it is right to find out the ways of the Lord and live them through good and bad. This is the foundation of the narrative that is passed on to oncoming generations. The Holy Spirit in the Elder can move in a prophetic way, calling the hearer back from questionable living to a life for God.

In chapter 11 of David Emmanuel Goatley's *Black Religion, Black Theology: The Collected Essays of J.Deotis Roberts*, in chapter 11, Roberts writes, ". . . we are exploiting the use of metaphors, parables, folk tales, and stories for a forceful language within which to interpret the Gospel. The common language and mode of thought among peoples of African descent is existential-but communal."[103] The narrative becomes more powerful when the story is well told. There is no one better to give a witness and testimony to a faith story than the one that has lived the story. Donald Matthews' *Honoring the Ancestors: An African Cultural Interpretation of Black Religion and Literature* was written upon the authors realization that his

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[103] David Emmanuel Goatley, *Black Religion, Black Theology: The Collected Essays of J. Deotis Roberts (African American Religious Thought and Life)* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), page 155.

seminary experiences had not given him the tools with which to interpret the religious and social experiences of the generation to which he was ministering, a generation composed of Elders who had experienced the hardships of life in the United States as second class citizens. Matthews shares, "I am concerned with a truly dialectical methodology for the interpretation of Black religion and literature."[104] Matthews' dialectic is formed around culture, politics, and psychology in the Black experience. He continues, "Black religion and literature reflect this postmodern emphasis on narrative creativity but they are always expressed by specific cultural structures in which we can see the imprint of Africa in form and meaning." Matthew's uses the antithetical devices found in Black narratives and contrasts them with African American spirituals, exploring the tensions found in African American life between the oppressed and the oppressor.

One such example in the book is the narrative *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (1974). Matthew's writes of an account from Shaw's life that shows the depths of oppression faced by Blacks in the South. This portion of the narrative concerns an incident where two Black men were falsely accused of raping two White women. The story goes that the men were electrocuted as a form of lynching, being falsely accused of rape by the White women they had been having consensual sex with. These women were found out and proceeded to protect themselves by accusing the men of rape. Matthew's labels this "rapetalistic oppression" and is defined as the inability of African Americans to have full control of their bodies under the system of chattel slavery and in the era of Jim Crow laws. The narrative then turns to the sexual coercion of Black prisoners by White prison guards. Each of these speaks to the sexual

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[104] Donald H. Matthews, *Honoring the Ancestors: an African Cultural Interpretation of Black Religion and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1998), ix

oppression of both Black men and Black women. "Black men were often accused of rape and summarily jailed and executed. Black women were often victims of rape and sexual abuse."[105] Matthews then turns to the spirituals that he says embodies recognition of this tension. The resolution to this oppression is found in such spirituals as:

> I'm a poor wayfaring stranger, while journeying through this world of woe
> While journeying through this world of woe,
> Yet there's no sickness, toil and danger,
> In that bright world to which I go. [106]

This narrative also shares Nate Shaw's conversion experience that allowed Shaw to maintain emotional ties with his family while in prison and also gave him strength to bear his prison sentence.[107] Matthews argues that through this story attention is focused on, "the narrative shape of the African American community."[108] Shaw's story is like that of many Black men who ended up in Southern jails due to either false accusation or an assertion of manhood. Within this social tension there is seen in the life of Shaw an ability to overcome the situation that he finds himself in, not through frustration or angry outbursts alone, but through adapting. Black men have been adapting to situations for years due to either oppression or, having been allowed into another social sphere, had to learn the social norms of that sphere in order to prove themselves worthy of a presence there. This story of adaptation is one that can provide tools for oncoming generations. But out of this tension, Matthews presents this spiritual as a part of the narrative that results from the deeply felt need to cry out to God for emotional healing and comfort as well as direct deliverance:

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[105] Ibid., 109.

[106] Ibid., 109.

[107] Ibid., 116.

[108] Ibid., 117.

When the storm of life is raging,
Stand by me, stand by me
When the world is tossing me,
Like a ship upon the sea,
Thou that rulest wind and water
Stand by me, stand by me.[109]

Matthew's argument for the spirituals as a part of the cultural narrative of African Americans is well founded. He states that, "Black theology has suffered because its starting point for the interpretation of liberation often has been divorced from the narratives of Black folk. Instead of listening to the people in the pews, Black theologians have gravitated toward Eurocentric conceptions of freedom and justice."[110] The people in the pews in this instance are the Elders with a testimony. They have a witness to the experiences that faith in God has brought them through and they possess a perspective that oncoming generations must tap into in order to mature in faith and live transformed lives so that they can be more than conquerors when the storms of life rage.

Diana Hayes in *And Still We Rise: An Introduction to Black Liberation Theology* writes, "It is the revelation of God's action in the world as revealed to Black Americans that has enabled them to withstand the rigors of their life." [111] Our Elders of the Church are from the generation that experienced a rigorous life filled with days of humiliation as well as sheer terror at the hands of oppressors. The safest place to be was among their own, in their own community and it is within the community that stories are formed and passed down. These accounts of life passed down in the community, both good and bad, form the basis of the theology that informs the experience.

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[109] Ibid., 117.

[110] Ibid., 138.

[111] Diana L. Hayes, *And Still We Rise: an Introduction to Black Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Pr, 1996), 81.

They tell the story of how they believed God intervened in their lives and on their behalf. With the Bible as a source of revelation, through faith they realized that God was in their midst and also working on their behalf. Blacks have had songs, stories, and prayers that made a difference in the moment of triumph and tragedy and they have been passed on from generation to generation. African Americans in the Black church are still looking for a day of redemption, but until then, "It was in these songs, stories, and prayers that they kept alive their hope and faith and, in return, were given the strength to "keep on keeping on"."[112]

The New Testament foundational scripture for this project, Titus 2:1-8 speaks of the relationship between Elders and young people. Older men and women are to teach young people about the faith, making disciples of Christ. They are to teach not only about sin, but perseverance through difficulty and God's ability to "make a way out of no way." David D. Mitchell in *Black Theology and Youth at Risk* speaks of the challenge for the African American community to, "cultivate a spirituality from Black theology that will teach practical moral principles in an effort to change self-destructive behavior patterns."[113] It is the community of faith that is supposed to teach these moral principles through the means of discipleship. The problem that presents itself is that many have lost that community connectedness and relationship that allowed life lessons to be communicated by any adult in the community. The voice of the Elder Prophet in the community and in the Church has been silent for a season, but it is time for that season to end. The Bible calls for the equipping of youth by allowing them to come to Christ and in coming to Christ they come into the community, the uniquely called out ecclesia, the body of believers. With the training up of the youth, they will in spite of straying from time to time ultimately come

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[112] Ibid., 83.

[113] David D. Mitchell, *Black Theology and Youths at Risk* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 67.

back to God. But this experience of being equipped is no longer for youth alone. Generations beyond youth have also lost an ear to hear the prophetic voice of the Elder telling them how they should live. The Prophetic Elder can be the voice that answers the question "how shall we live?" out of their experiences with God. The Titus 2 scripture calls for the involvement of both women and men, therefore the voice of womanist theology must be heard in the laying of this foundation. Katie Cannon in *Black Womanist Ethics* speaks of the works of Zora Neal Hurston concerning Black women as providing, "a concrete frame of reference for understanding the Black woman as a moral agent."[114] Black women, in spite of oppression within and from outside of the community, have always been a source of examples of virtuous living. From the outside looking in Black ethics have been seen as illegitimate, echoing the same sentiments found in Patte's work on different readings in critical exegesis. The parallel being that any other reading as well as any other moral compass other than that of the dominant culture is considered to be unacceptable. Cannon contends that the Black community had to, "create and cultivate values and virtues in their own terms so that they can prevail against the odds with moral integrity."[115] The strength of faithful Black women is found in their ability to survive and move in and out of different spheres that encompass different worldviews concerning race and culture. Unfortunately in each sphere Black women have found themselves used and abused by the women of one culture and the men of their own culture from time to time. Black womanist theology seeks to counter the worldviews associated with the patriarchal systems of both white and Black societies.

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[114] Diana L. Hayes, *And Still We Rise: an Introduction to Black Liberation Theology* , 142.

[115] Ibid., 143.

In Dolores Williams's article, "*Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices*," Williams describes, "womanist theological methodology consisting of "a.) a multidialogical intent, b.) a liturgical event, c.) a didactic event, and d.) a commitment both to reason and to the validity of female imagery and metaphorical language in the construction of theological statements." [116] What Black women have to teach concerns a persistent faith and determination. Within this are all the aforementioned that aligns with the Titus 2 text. There is much for the older women to teach the younger women. These conversations teach morals, worship, life skills, and a positive outlook grounded in Biblical faith. Women as Prophetic Elders have the ability to, "teach Christians new insights about moral life based on ethics supporting justice for women, survival, and a productive quality of life for poor women, children, and men."[117] Hayes concludes that a Black ethic can be synthesized from Black folk wisdom and Black women's moral wisdom.[118]

From the theological perspective, this project seeks to encourage the revival of an atmosphere where the Elder's wisdom and moral compass are raised to a level of respect and dignity not seen in many years. Proof of the need for Prophetic Elders to speak into the lives of oncoming generations is not hard to find in today's society in general and in our local communities in particular. The Church is the sphere for their voices to be heard, as the call for righteous living and turning back to God should be commonly heard in the Church and heard from those mature disciples who have a solid witness and testimony that the way of the Lord is right. It is traditional for Elders, particularly in the tradition of the Black Church, to be the repositories of testimonies to the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

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[116] Ibid., 144.

[117] Ibid., 145.

[118] Ibid., 145.

Elders can teach how to overcome deep woundedness that will keep internalized pain from becoming sin to the one who feels it. Through the wisdom found in their stories of faith, Elders can make a clarion call for the Church from generation to generation to turn back toward Biblical truth that will lead to a closer walk with God and thus a life lived with the righteousness of God in view and through that righteousness there is instilled fresh hope for life now and the life to come.

Historical Foundations

On Thanksgiving Day 2011 the researcher sat at his dining room table toward the end of his family gathering listening to his mother, mother in law and wife talk about the pitfalls of another relative who was new to cooking collard greens in the traditional family way. This led to a conversation about family recipes that included the details of the ingredients and how their mothers had written down from year to year how they adjusted each recipe. But with the passing of each relative, a recipe was lost and the formidable task had to begin of recreating the flavor of a sweet potato pie or the sweetness of a pitcher of iced tea. With the loss of the Elders of the family, a piece of the cooking heritage of the family was lost, thus the family has been left to figure out how to recreate those moments that lead to living the family legacy.

The heritage of faith in the Church is passed on iu the same manner as a recipe for pie and tea, except it is a recipe for living a life of faith in God. The Elders of the church retain their expertise of living life and avoiding life's pitfalls. As each oue passes away, it leaves the next generation with the struggle of re-learning the lessons that life taught the Elders whose recipes for living life with God passed away with them. The ministry of the elder saints of the church is of the utmost necessity to the community of faith and has a strong foundation in writings on the development and education of the Christian community.

A recognized authority on the importance of passing on the lessons from and honoring the lives of Elders is Anne Streaty Wimberly of the Interdenominational Theological Center. In Her book *Honoring African American Elders*, Wimberly remembers some of the stories her 'Pop Pop' would tell her about his life. After remembering his funnier anecdotes she somberly reflects, "But other things he'd say let you know his life wasn't easy. I remember though, every time he'd tell his story, he'd end with "God has brought me a mighty long way. God never forsakes us. You remember that child." [119] Elders have retained memories of the good and bad in life. Some details may fade but the lessons remain to be shared with those who will listen. The silent generation should yield to oncoming generations the fruits of their experience with God and how that experience can be had by others. Elders have this song to sing when it comes to the essence of their witness:

> We've come this far by faith. Leaning on the Lord.
> Trusting in His holy word....
> Just the other day I heard someone say he didn't believe in God's word.
> But I can truly say that God has made a way. And He's never failed me yet.
> That's why we've come this far by faith.[120]

Elders in the black church deserve to be honored and heard because they have come so far by faith. Wimberly argues, "The challenge to African American churches is to assure the presence of these ministries and to maintain honor as the center of every ministry activity. Making this happen requires an intentional process and an invitation to churches to take the time to reenvision these ministries."[121]

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[119] Anne Streaty Wimberly, ed., *Honoring African American Elders: a Ministry in the Soul Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 4.

[120] Albert Goodson, Composer (1963) *We've Come This Far By Faith* found in Juan Williams and Quinton Dixie, *This Far by Faith: Stories from the African-American Religious Experience* (New York: William Morrow, 2003), 9.

[121] Anne Streaty Wimberly, ed., *Honoring African American Elders: a Ministry in the Soul Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 4.

Through reenvisioning, Wimberly suggests that this ministry of honoring Elders will call members of the Black Church back from what she calls the prevailing climate of individualism to a focus on the needs of the community. The stories and life lessons of Elders are a critical ingredient in the glue that holds communities of faith together and the history of the Black Church that reaches back to its origins in Africa acknowledge this fact. According to Wimberly honoring Elders is a cultural value found in African American life writing that, "Stories and beliefs from the African past and the slavery years depict it."[122] Wimberly also notes, "the motive for honoring Elders derives from the ancestral view that the actions of persons who honor Elders make tangible the Elders' experience of God's love."[123] Hearing the story of the Elders is life affirming for them. Hearing them tells them that they matter. They are worthy to be heard and their lives and their stories can make a difference for oncoming generations. Wimberly supports her argument by citing a classic text in the study of black slavery, Eugene Genovese's work *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. Wimberly quotes that, "careful attention to and respect for the aged carried on a classic African attitude."[124] Quoting Genovese again, Wimberly writes, "the slaves, including the children, looked to the needs of their old people and treated them with respect and deference that offset the humiliation heaped on them by condescending, not to mention unkind, whites."[125] Quoting Peter Paris from his *Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse,* Wimberly again submits, "that African ancestors held to the belief that the normative value of tradition is embodied in those

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[122] Ibid., 5.

[123] Ibid., 6.

[124] Ibid., 6.

[125] Ibid., 7.

who have lived to see old age…"[126] Elders are significantly tied to the communities in which they live and their stories are a significant part of community life. "Older men and women were the storytellers who bolstered the spirit of the young and passed on community sayings, beliefs, and values."[127] Wimberly speaks of Elders in the slave community as being endowed with a kind of wisdom known as "mother wit", saying that, "It entails a kind of intuitive knowing how to judge a given situation and what, if anything, to do about it."[128] Wimberly believes there is sufficient evidence that this kind of relationship has been on the decline for some time, thus it is critical to bring this kind of ministry back to the center of church life. Quoting Asa Hilliard's *The Maroon Within Us: Selected Essays on African American Socialization,* Wimberly shares, "Hilliard refers to a process of "cultural surrender" whereby time is not taken to know either parents or grandparents."[129] The culture that has been surrendered is the culture of recognizing the role that Elders play as repositories of community wisdom. Their mother wit is no longer regarded as relevant to the current social climate of a skeptical post-modern age. Younger generations, Wimberly suggests, "are increasingly left to rely on substitute "wisdoms" from peers and the media. This situation prevents the historical grounding of the young and diminishes the possibilities of their gaining awareness of positive parenting and grandparenting roles."

Wimberly's call to honor and pass on the life story, wisdom, and Christian witness of Elders is paralleled by other scholars. Their stories have become a part of the history of the church and sharing of this type is regarded as oral Christian history on a micro-historical level.

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[126] Ibid., 8.

[127] Ibid., 8.

[128] Ibid., 9.

[129] Ibid., 9.

Gordon Heath, assistant professor of Christian history at McMaster Divinity College affirms, "…in many cultures oral accounts have played an important part in the preservation and transmission of the past." He continues, "…oral accounts are often more authoritative than any written document."[130] An Elder passing on their faith believes that their life was and continues to be ordered by divine providence. In the development of their stories they participate in a form of historical theology defined as theology, "with an emphasis on the historical context in which theological statements were formulated." [131] Instead of published writings, they are oral histories. Each person is the historian of their lives and those who live a life of faith believe that God has been working in, through, and around them. Passing on a personal history of faith is as important as passing on the history of the Church itself because body of Christ is made up of individual members who should be encouraged by personal faith histories. Elders are in a great position to give some of the best encouragement to hold fast to the confession of faith. The term Elder can even be refined with the addition of the term "prophetic" to give the witnessing, testifying senior the designation of Prophetic Elder. Prophecy being not only a reference to the future, but in this case prophecy is, "speaking in the name of God, under divine mandate and inspiration."[132] Included in the testimony and witness of the Elder is an inherent call back to ways of living and being in another time and place that worked not only for themselves but that fostered an atmosphere and relationships that are counter to what is being experienced today. The warnings in an Elder's testimony and witness are prophetic as they call the hearer up to another level of faith, back to another way of living, or to a change in the direction of their life.

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[130] Gordon L. Heath, *Doing Church History: A User-Friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008), 62.

[131] Ibid., 36.

[132] Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 140.

The ministry of this Prophetic Elder is illustrated in a brief sermon from H. Beecher Hicks' work entitled *My Soul's Been Anchored.* The sermon, 'The Ministry of Uncle Mugga', has as its thesis that there is the need for the simple ministry of loving kindness. This loving kindness ministry was embodied in an Elder in the community known as Uncle Mugga. Uncle Mugga was a woman who ministered loving kindness not only in the food and treats she gave but in the structure she provided for children in the community. Uncle Mugga is described as loving, faithful, and willing. Hicks writes, "What a wonderful treat it would be if we could just get back to those times when people were concerned, and cared, and freely gave of themselves faithfully, with no motive greater than kindness."[133] Hicks proclaims imaginatively, "I wonder if God, in his imagination, *ordained* Uncle Mugga to that rare and marvelous ministry of kindness. Uncle Mugga's ministry was to be the anchor of heart and soul upon which little ones could lean, an immovable anchor of childlike trust."[134] God may very well place our seniors here for us under a prophetic ordination, a purpose for which they may not have been released to fulfill in their congregations. The prophetic ministry of an "Uncle Mugga" may begin with young children, but can extend and be relevant to all generations.

If the Incarnation is the central event in all of human history, as Heath points out, then the moment that a human being trusts Christ for their salvation, justification before God and their entrance into the community of believers must be the central event in an individual's life story. Believers give a witness that tells a personal history that is full of providential language because they are convinced that God has acted on their behalf for their good. Oncoming generations need reference points from the past.

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[133] H. Beecher Hicks Jr., *My Soul's Been Anchored: A Preacher's Heritage in the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 37.

[134] Ibid., 38.

Alister McGrath in his *Christian Theology: An Introduction* writes on the nation of Israel's history and development in much the same terms. He comments, "Israel sought to find its identity through links with the past. (Walter) Brueggemann emphasizes the importance of texts during this era, as these provided a means by which the "threatened present generation" could connect up with "the horizon of reference points from the past."[135] Surely one can argue that the present generation is experiencing pressures that threaten it. Elders can provide points of reference from their witness that oncoming generations can cling to. As opposed to reading a text, the Elders provide living epistles that give instruction that will help oncoming generations deal with the trials and tribulations of life. Generally many cultures have an oral history tradition. Passing on wisdom and lessons learned at a certain point in age is a time honored tradition. It is necessary for the preservation of a people's history and legacy. What examples can be called upon that show that the Church should participate in historical theology? One of the first models of oral history that can be adapted by the church comes from the 1993 best seller *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First One Hundred Years.* This book was a phenomenal look at the lives of two African-American ladies from North Carolina who had much to say about their lives and experiences having grown up in the Jim Crow south in the late 19th century and survived into last quarter of the 20th century. Through their writing they were able to pass on to the entire world their life story and testimony that is so rich, two more books were born out of their experiences. The intent of this project is to create opportunities for those "having our say" moments to play out in a local church setting. The value of oral history as a teaching methodology has not gone unnoticed by the Academy.

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[135]Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction*, 5th ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 376.

The Women in Theology and Ministry Program, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, has presented the Prophetic Pioneers in Religious Education course. An oral history project was developed as a part of that course. The purpose of the course is, "to explore religious education history, issues, and visions through life story, contextual analysis, and educational theories, practices and cultural 'products'."[136] The oral histories of three women were taken in the class in order to, "gather their stories and draw upon their wisdom."[137] Oral history is cited as, "a distinctive educational approach that has value to equip people for life-giving relations with others, whether in education, ministry, public activism, or other vocations."[138] In the article *Hearing Voices* Pastor and Professor Reginald Blount recounts the voices that he heard, both negative and positive while growing up in the faith and secular communities that made up his childhood in Harlem, New York.[139] He saw his mother struggle, but heard encouragement to create the best future for himself that he could. The Mennonite Church he attended affirmed his place in the community of faith and as an individual beloved of God. He contrasted these voices with those of peers and other races who discouraged academic success and had low regard for the place of African Americans in society. Blount concludes that these voices, "taught me that our identity, our sense of meaning making, including the work of faith formation, is greatly fashioned by the conversations with have with others."[140] What he would become, he writes, would depend on the voices that influenced him the most.

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[136] Claire Bischoff and Mary Elizabeth Mullino More, "Cultivating a Spirit for Justice and Peace: Teaching Through Oral History", "*Religious Education*" 102 no 2 Spr 2007, p 151-171.

[137] Ibid., 151.

[138] Ibid,. 152.

[139] Reginald Blount, "Hearing Voices". "*Religious Education*" 102 no 2 Spr 2007, p 108-110.

[140] Ibid., 109.

Anne Streaty Wimberly has added more insight to this project with her work, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*, which argues for the use of a Christian education process of story linking that answers the need in the African American community for learning that brings about liberation alongside Christian vocation. The educational model has existed in the African American community since the time of slavery. The "link" in story linking is two-fold. First it concerns individuals whose lives and life choices have been shaped by the gospel. Second it concerns linking experienced Elders with oncoming generations. Wimberly articulates:

> In linking with Christian faith heritage stories of African Americans, persons relate themselves to exemplars who chose ways of living in community that were informed by the gospel. The intent is for African Americans to be encouraged and inspired by the lives of persons who faced life circumstances with which they can readily identify. And it is aimed toward persons choosing to cooperate with this activity by acting in ways that are liberating for them and others.[141]

What Wimberly suggests is at the heart of this project. It should be considered essential for the Elders who have lead what Wimberly describes as an exemplary life and overcome a myriad of difficult life circumstances to recount their stories for the benefit of the oncoming generations in their community. This strategy of story linking can be used in the creation of a culture of honoring and learning from the living histories of members of a congregation. This kind of culture and atmosphere could make it difficult for individuals and couples to have questions that go unanswered or problems that go unaddressed. Wimberly encourages that development of this kind of culture,

> Persons are searching for forums in which they can address who they are and can become in their everyday social contexts. They also desire guidance in seeing options and deciding, consciously and intentionally, ways of living and serving as Christians that are liberating and that imbue their lives with meaning and purpose. [142]

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[141] Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*, rev. ed. (Nashville,: Abingdon Press, 2005), location 41, Kindle Version.

[142] Ibid., Kindle Location 58.

This culture also draws people into seeking answers from within the community versus outside sources. With such a diversity of media resources which seek to draw the attention of believers with flash and quick answers, it is hard to find opportunities for personal introspection that happen face to face. Many turn to small group settings that may provide this face to face interaction, but those groups may not create the culture that is created by a story linking model. The model creates an atmosphere for reflection and validation, "Many participants seek spiritual enrichment through their dialogue with the Bible and with one another."[143] Also, "Some seek to validate ways they have handled life struggles or how they are now living out the intricate details of their lives. Some look for specific answers to issues and questions arising from dire life consequences. They seek freedom from these circumstances and pathways to a better more meaningful life."[144] Believers desire to have a life of meaning and that desire is created at the new birth. Wimberly describes the desire for meaning and sharing as a consciousness of liberation. Wimberly expresses that, "Liberated people recognize their need to share themselves and their stories with another. They also recognize their need to receive the same from others. From the Christian perspective, they see life as a gift worthy of sharing."[145] Ultimately this story linking model serves to connect believers with their past, but the connection is made with purpose. "Linking with our forebears' story helps to inspire us and to foster our commitment to continue on the Christian faith walk. This linkage also promotes our openness and expectation to be continually formed and informed by the story of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ."[146] These soul stories are a part of a continuum of African American history.

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[143] Ibid., Kindle Location 86.

[144] Ibid., Kindle Location 86.

[145] Ibid., Kindle Location 163.

[146] Ibid., Kindle Location 257.

While these personal stories may not make history books, they are key elements in preserving the continuity of a faith community and its story. There is a sense that living history and storytelling has lost its importance in the African American community. The story linking model itself is how African American history and family legacies have been passed on and is itself a part of African American history.

The Church, known as the *ekklesia*, is a unique community of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Each member of this body has a unique role to play. Ideas were developed early on concerning the roles of Elders in the life of the *ekklesia.* Respect and reverence for Elders appears in Greek philosophy and in the writings of the early church fathers. William Clements in *Ministry with the Aging* quotes Plato from his *Laws* concerning marks of the respect for the elderly:

> Seniority is held in the highest consideration alike by gods and by men who intend a long and happy life. Hence the public assault of a younger man on his senior is a shameful spectacle and abominable in the eye of heaven. If the younger man is struck by the elder, the seemly course is ever that he should meekly give place to his anger, and thus lay up a capital of the same consideration for his own old age. Hence our rule shall run thus. All shall show their reverence for their seniors in act and speech.[147]

The world of early Christians already had a foundation laid for respect for Elders and the early Church Father's paralleled this opinion but Clements proves that this respect was given for more reasons than the fact that they were simply older people. Clements argues, "New Testament discussions of the behavior and responsibilities of older men and women, and of widows in particular, require from them a high level of Christian perfection: personal, familial, and

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[147] William M Clements, *Ministry with the Aging: Designs, Challenges, Foundations*, ed. William M. Clements (New York: Routledge, 1989), 42.

ecclesial. Those who fulfilled these requirements were certainly good guides, counselors, and, eventually, physicians of souls."[148] Clements quotes Tertullian:

> "…their experimental training in all the affections may, on the one hand, have rendered them capable of readily aiding all others with counsel and comfort, and that, on the other, they may none the less have travelled down the whole course of probation whereby a female can be tested."[149]

Clements looks also to Clement of Alexandria who suggests to the rich that they build an army around them that includes, "…pious old men…" and "...widows armed with meekness…"[150] However, there is a view of the elderly in the early church as having the time for quiet hours of prayer and meditation. Therefore not only does their experience make them good counselors and advisors but their constant time spent with God equips them with Godly wisdom for the position as well. Clements describes them as, "the natural fruit of Christian life reaching its maturity."[151] Clements continues his commentary of the early church Father's view of the elderly, "We have seen that they are the "holy ones" mentioned by Tertullian, and the genuine friends and healers mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, who are always available when a weaker brother, even a fallen one, needs help."[152] Polycarp of Smyrna is quoted by Clements concerning the consecrated condition of widows, describing them as the altar of God, "widows and orphans who eat the fruit of alms—should not be desecrated by offerings coming from sinners, especially those who are guilty of social injustice."[153]

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[148] Ibid., 43.

[149] Ibid., 44.

[150] Ibid., 44.

[151] Ibid., 45.

[152] Ibid., 45.

[153] Ibid., 47.

The Elders have a great closeness to God in the eyes of the church fathers, "Through prayer, fasting, and continence they reach a great closeness to God, from whom they receive revelations and favors which benefit their community. Since their brethren expect to receive through their agency physical healing, spiritual counseling, revelations, and favors from God, the widows are regarded as being themselves spiritual or charismatic."[154] Widows in particular who are contemplative and given over to prayer and fasting are able through charisms to be of service to the community. Clearly the early fathers held Elders in general and widows in particular in high esteem and believed that they were of significant benefit to the community of faith and were able to impart to other believers not only their wisdom but impact their lives through gifts of the Spirit as well.

Moving forward to the twentieth and early twenty first century the memory of the roots of African American storytelling and the understanding of its necessity in the Church is still fresh. In Bobby Joe Saucer and Jean Alicia Elster's 2005 work *Our Help In Ages Past: The Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly*, they call to mind that, "the truths we now read were passed down from generation to generation by the carriers of sacred oral tradition. This phenomenon is also true in the African American heritage. African villages had sages whose soul job was to commit to memory the history of their ancestors. These repositories of communal wisdom were known as *griots.*"[155] Our Elders are still repositories of wisdom who have life stories that can contribute to the well being of the community.

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[154] Ibid., 49.

[155] Bobby Joe Saucer, *Our Help in Ages Past: the Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly* (Valley Forge,: Judson Press, 2005), 82.

Saucer and Elster argue that this ministry is essential:

> These golden nuggets are also the bedrock for black Christian education. The content gleaned from the lives of our African American Elders must be taught to the younger generations. The payoff for the personal and corporate existence of the race is this: If African Americans of all ages give heed to and serve the black elderly, we can save ourselves and all trailing generations. Without this essential partnership, the future is destined to be bleak.[156]

The voice of the Elders should not only be heard, but heeded. Their voices have reminded communities of ways of living and challenged those going in the wrong direction. Saucer and Elster suggest a model for creating the atmosphere in which Elders are heard and valued. Mentor training is their suggested avenue. "Having tasted both the bitterness and sweetness of life, the black elderly have a natural feel for what is genuine and life affirming. Because of this unique perspective that time alone can provide, they are ideal mentors for children, youth, and young adults."[157] Sitting at the feet of the Elders in a mentoring atmosphere is viewed by Saucer and Elster as a necessary rite of passage for young people. Their suggested program model is not a onetime meeting or event but a relationship built over time, even a relationship that extends into adulthood and beyond. Training and program development, however, is essential to the success of this model. "The elderly typically represent a pool of adults with decades of secular education and skilled work experience, but with little history of church school or youth ministry involvement."[158] Saucer and Elster suggest training modules that include early childhood adolescent emotional and physical development, an introduction to the current youth culture, and specific expectations of children, youth, and young adults. Saucer and Elster's program development model includes time for weekly sessions, group and one on one interaction, field

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[156] Ibid., 83.

[157] Ibid., 35.

[158] Ibid., 36.

trips and travel to local colleges, visits from social workers and counselors as needed, and visits from guest speakers or celebrities. Saucer and Elster also expand the program beyond the personal experiences of Elders to include, "purchasing appropriate curricula from health-focused and educational resources."[159] The Elder of the church, a modern day Griot, should be a committed life-long learner themselves who is committed to the uplifting and sharing the values of the past while learning about and understanding the kinds of social pressures and developmental issues faced by oncoming generations. Elders can be trained using such models as Urban Ministries, Inc. *Successful Strategies for Teaching Across Generations, Successful Teaching, Powerful Learning: Tools for Transformative Teaching,* and *The Whole Life Curriculum: Education for Whole Spiritual Development.* These training modules are presented by trained Urban Ministries consultants and address not only appropriate teaching strategies that promote learning but also address the whole personality which the module suggests can be divided into, "the physical, the mental, the emotional, the social, and the moral; but the center of every being is the Spirit."[160] Oncoming generations will not only be hearers and doers of the stories and admonitions given by Elders, they are encouraged in Saucer and Elster's work to be the preservers of their stories as well by actively participating in historic preservation and archiving. "We must also educate black children and youth in the tools needed to preserve our oral traditions. We need to equip them with pen and paper, computers and cameras, trained and attentive ears and eyes, interview techniques and skills, and all of the latest digital technology to guarantee preservation of oral data."[161]

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[159] Ibid., 38.

[160] _____ "Whole Life Curriculum: Education for Whole Life Spiritual Development" [Presentation for Sunday School and Church Leadership Staff Development, Urban Ministries, Inc.]

[161] Bobby Joe Saucer, *Our Help in Ages Past: the Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2005), 83.

Saucer and Elster call this work a ministry of preservation. They argue that, "The implementation of a storytelling model must be built upon a multi-tiered foundation. These tiers include setting, interview technique, topic, and presentation and preservation."[162] An organized moment of sharing or storytelling can be presented in small or large settings. One on one interviewing or presentations to large audiences with pre-formatted questions are two general options that are available for story sharing. Each setting calls for certain techniques to be exercised. Recorded small group sessions can be held with younger interviews. "This approach is probably best for aging members whose physical and mental health does not permit lengthy sessions or formal public presentations."[163] A more formal program may be held to honor a church Elder. In this case it is, "particularly conducive to submitting questions to the senior in advance and allowing him or her to prepare a presentation in response to those questions, whether in an educational or anecdotal fashion."[164] Whatever topic is presented the means for historic preservation and archiving should be available. The means vary from audio to video formats. Saucer and Elster suggest different uses for the information collected from documentary style keepsakes to the use of the material in the creation of some form of dramatic presentation that would further impress the story and life lessons on the minds of participants. "All of these can work together to become an ongoing project or series of projects. The interviews or presentations can be worked onto the church calendar on a regular basis. Updated or companion videotapes, books, newsletters, and photos can be developed periodically and disttibuted

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[162] Ibid., 83.

[163] Ibid., 85.

[164] Ibid., 85.

throughout the congregation."[165] Saucer and Elster conclude that, "story manifests its power not only to preserve but also to transform, grounded on the firm foundation of a faith-filled history."[166]

The Hampton University Minister's Conference Choir Directors Guild and Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, former Secretary of the Hampton University Minister's Conference and former University Chaplain and Pastor of the Memorial Church, have created a living history program that follows the pattern for a larger, consistent program in Saucer and Elster's work. The Alfred C.D. Vaughn Senior Statesmen's Hour presents and preserves the lives and ministries of senior pastors and leaders of the church. It is described in Dr. Boddie's work *Wisdom of the Sages: Conversations with the A. C. D. Vaughn Senior Statesmen 1996-2005 as*, "an opportunity for cross generational sharing that respected both the wisdom of those of those who have labored long and successfully in the ministry and the deeply authentic desire younger ministers have expressed in listening to the wisdom God has given to their Elders."[167] This is an example of the planned presentation and preservation of the life and experiences of Elders of the Church who just happen to be some of the most effective pastor's and preachers in the world. The intentional nature of the Senior Statesmen's Hour is clear:

> Person's selected as leaders of the Senior Statesman's Hour were asked to be prepared to share the depth of their experiences to include the instances of success and of disappointment or challenge. The intent has always been to engage in truthful exchange, in part because any insightful attendee knows that no one has had a life and ministry of complete success without the occasional bump in the road.[168]

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[165] Ibid., 88.

[166] Ibid., 88.

[167] Timothy Tee Boddie, *Wisdom of the Sages: Conversations with the A.C.D. Vaughn Senior Statesmen 1996-2005 Hampton University Ministers' Conference* (Chicago, IL.: Urban Ministries, Inc., 2007), 1.

[168] Ibid., 1.

Dr. Michael A. Battle, Sr.'s introduction to this work speaks of an exchange between Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. and Otis Moss III. They represent the elder and the oncoming generation coming together and showing:

> clear evidence of the mutual dependency each generation has on the other. The wisdom of the sages would not be transmitted by the limited life time of the sage if the next generations do not benefit from that wisdom. At the same time, the innovative concepts of the emerging generation will be void of direction without the foundation laid by those who have already passed this way[169]

Dr. Battle concludes his introduction, "It is my confident hope that the Senior Statesmen's Hour will continue to enrich the life of the church by providing opportunity for open discussion about the testimonies of the Elders."[170] While these testimonies were arranged for a specialized group, the kind of presentation and preservation in Dr. Boddie's work parallels that which this project seeks to offer to the Church.

Just as oncoming generations of preachers need to be built up by hearing the origins and experiences of the best of preachers, so oncoming generations of believers need to be built up by hearing the origins and experiences of Elders in the church who can share their faith to encourage and inspire their community. One of the most striking testimonies from Dr. Boddie's work is that of Dr. Wyatt T. Walker from June 3, 1997. A giant in ministry not only tells the story of his attempt to run away from God saying, "I determined in my mind that if I majored in the natural sciences, I could get away from God,"[171] but also shares his salvation and ministry call narratives, both of which Dr. Walker was reluctant to accept.

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[169] Ibid., 2.

[170] Ibid., 3.

[171] Ibid., 21.

He was so reluctant in fact that Dr. Walker attempted to get someone to take his place at the chapel service that Virginia Union required students to attend. He tells the story of accepting Christ after hearing the preaching of Gardner C. Taylor in the Coburn Chapel at Virginia Union University. It was after Dr. Walker's father's preaching in the same chapel that he began to discern the call to ministry, but it was Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor who advised him on how to make a change in his career from biochemistry to ministry. Dr. Walker even remembered the three points of Dr. Proctor's sermon that he preached for Dr. Walker's ordination, "He said you have to tell Jesus: who Jesus is, what He did and what He means."[172]

This foundational segment serves to underscore the need for such presentation and preservation that is suggested in Saucer and Elster's work and carried out in Dr. Boddie's work. A testimony such as Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker's not only it encourages, informs, and inspires the oncoming generation. He shows the audience that it is okay to struggle internally with what life is and means for an individual. He shows the necessity of an elder coming along side a member of the next generation, helping them become equipped, and giving them opportunities to face challenges and grow in their vocation. Dr. Boddie's work shows that this pattern of presentation and preservation is necessary for the Church in general and the Black Church in particular. Every believer needs a foundation on which they can build and the witness and testimony of the Elders is the place to start. Saucer and Elster summarize the goals of this project and the argument of this historical foundation segment quite well:

> The black church is crucial not only for the recovery and corrective reclamation of African American children, youth, and young adults, but also for ensuring that the wisdom of our Elders is treasured and not cast aside. It is the black church that can corral the resources to create and sustain a mentoring program between generations. It is the black church that can bring together the participants to make such a mentoring program happen. It is the black church that can remind its senior members that the best way to gain a new lease on life is to share their life's testimony with the generation to come.[173]

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[172] Ibid., 23.

[173] Bobby Joe Saucer, *Our Help in Ages Past: the Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly*

Summary

The biblical, theological, and historical foundations of the project not only serve as the foundation on which this research is constructed, but are meant to challenge the participant and the community of faith in the present ministry context to examine the portions of the Word of God, and clarify a theological and historical understanding of how God has worked in and been revealed through ideas and observations associated with the researcher's focus area. In this instance the community is supposed to take the biblical, theological, and historical cues to intentionally encourage development of faithful living that pleases God in their generation and pass that knowledge on to oncoming generations. The goal is for both the older believer and the younger believer alike to develop and share in community as it is revealed in scripture. The older believer that is well into the transformative process and has soundness in their faith is encouraged through biblical examples to call oncoming generations to themselves in formal and informal ways and share examples of faithful living that is acceptable to God and maintains the stability and growth of the community. This in turn sets up the community of faith to make an impact on the context in which they live and minister.

(Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2005), 39.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

The researcher has developed this project with the intent of ensuring that the Elders of New Living Stone Christian Church were not only cognizant of the need for their active presence in the life of the Church and their community as prescribed through the Biblical mandate on their lives, but also acted on that knowledge by actively participating in the audio and video preservation of their faith narrative while being a ready source of encouragement to keep the faith, of knowledge and of pragmatic wisdom to those around them.. The researcher believes that if Elders are informed that they should not be silent, that their voices are still needed, and their voices recovered through the Christian Educational concepts of the study of foundational Bible scriptures, spiritual formation through an understanding of narrative theology and identifying God's presence in their lives, along with instruction on faith transmission and faith conservation, then Elders will renew their heritage of prophetic speech to families and communities and begin to speak confidently as Christian Griots to oncoming generations in ways that will encourage a return to the faith and a renewed embrace of the hope, the inheritance, and the power of living as children of God. These Elders will share their stories and leave a legacy for oncoming generations through audio and visual media that can be stored in the Church's archives.

The researcher first envisioned the project as a means through which the faith narratives of members of the silent generation, those born before, during, and just after World War II, could be archived as tools for counseling, discipleship, and examples of perseverance in the faith. The studies of the researcher in preparation of for this project inspired an expanded vision for its implementation; the end being to impact a broader spectrum of the field of Christian Education and Urban Ministry Development. The research in the state of the art of this ministry model illuminates not only the existence of a generation gap but also the need to prepare the silent generation to engage and embrace oncoming generations, evidence of which is presented in Chapter Two. In light of these observations it was necessary to add a more robust curriculum that responds to reported, research based needs in the body of Christ as a whole. This curriculum serves to train members of the silent generation to become what the context participants went on to define as Christian Griots that are prepared not only to archive their narratives but also to embrace the identity of a Griot in the African tradition that is able to set aside stereotypes and develop stronger ties with oncoming generations while telling the story of the Christian faith in their community. These Griots intend to share and preserve moments of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation from their lives that illustrate the faithfulness of God in moments of quiet, moments of sorrow, and moments of triumph.

The researcher seeks to raise the consciousness of the seniors in the context that God requires much of them in service and ministry because of the long life that God has been pleased to grant them. In the course of their over twenty years of fellowship together before the researcher became their pastor, the seniors in this context experienced abusive and divisive treatment at the hands of previous church leaders. The researcher has seen signs in five years of pastoral ministry that the members lack confidence in their level of discipleship and have a

reduced level self-esteem as believers in their own eyes. The researcher believes this ministry model will assist to counter this congregational pain while fulfilling the primary goals of the project and proving the validity of the hypothesis.

The researcher will discuss in detail the preparation of seniors for their role as Prophetic Elders who act as Christian Griots in their Church. In the preparation, memories were revived as the seniors told their stories that showed that even after all of their years of life there were still within them memories that remain painful and conflicts that to this day were unresolved. The researcher made a concerted effort to create a program that was visually stimulating and auditorially thought provoking. These efforts yielded much toward prompting dialogue, memories, and story-linking between the content, their personal lives, and the Scriptures related to their experience.

A concurrent mixed method of narrative research is used to collect data. Qualitative data was collected with a thirteen question pre-survey administered before the beginning the six session treatment. During and after each session qualitative data was collected through journaling and video documentation of discussions during the treatment. Qualitative data was collected at the end of the sixth session in the form of a post-survey that measured the impact of the sessions in terms of changes in understanding of the concepts presented in the sessions, attitude, and self perception in comparison with pre-survey.

The pre-survey sought to measure the participants self-valuation as pertains to their importance to the Church of Jesus Christ, their role as keepers of the faith and cultural traditions of their community, and their understanding of their role in being a help to oncoming generations and struggling people by sharing their faith narratives. Other questions in the pre-survey sought to understand the perception of the participants as Disciples of Christ.

These prompts sought to reveal attitudes about adherence to the Word of God, their understanding of the term *prophetic*, and their understanding of God's presence in their lives, their spiritual gifts, how they perceive their walk of faith and their role as a voice of wisdom and encouragement to the Church. The post-survey is a re-application of the pre-survey that serves to measure changes in participants' self perception as a disciple of Christ and the importance of their faith narrative to their families and future generations, their understanding of the term 'prophetic,' and of their ability to use their spiritual gifting in exercising their role as a prophetic elder. after the implementation of the project is complete.

The researcher defines *elders* as those in the context who are sociologically classified as the "silent generation". Those who were born in the years preceding, during, and just after World War II, approximately 1929 through the early 1950's, are grouped in this category. These elders will participate in six teaching sessions. These sessions will instill in the Elders a sense that God is not through with them yet. They will be encouraged to know that their voices should serve as powerful witnesses as well as receive instruction on how to build relationships with the generations that will make up the future Christian community. Participants will also come away with greater confidence in their knowledge of how to study the Scriptures and a broader understanding of Biblical and theological concepts.

The researcher will start session one with Bible studies of the foundational scriptures of the project, Genesis 4:3-8 and Titus 2:1-8. This session will lay a foundation for understanding the Biblical examples of the intervention of the voice of the Elder and the New Testament Christian community as a teaching community where examples of faith and life are passed down from the older to younger. Also included in the first session is the historical precedent of the oral tradition with its origins in African culture, along with illustrations of the Griot/Elder in the

African tradition. The precedent found in Church life along with a definition of what it means to be prophetic is presented.

The researcher believes that a fresh look at the Scriptures that vividly illustrate God's intervention in the life of a prominent Biblical character will prompt story-linking of the participant's life and the emotions of a particular period of time to the text. This story-linking will serve to help the participant recall moments when they knew God was present, moments that will aid in effective witness/testimony that are also important segments of the faith narrative to be recorded and archived. It is also believed that as an African American congregation, teaching the connection of the participants to the African heritage of the community Griot will also help them to be more comfortable envisioning themselves in that role.

In session two, the characteristics of the silent generation and the generations coming after them will be presented. Reflection questions provoke thinking on the appearance of those characteristics in their lives and how stereotypical images of other generations can hinder developing relationships. Reflecting on the characteristics of the silent generation serves to prompt memories of the creed, code, and culture that they lived under and how that played a significant role in their own formation. This memory will be an important piece of the archived narrative. Studying the research on the state of the generations into whose lives they are speaking serves to promote an understanding of the needs of those generations and the important points of possible contention to look for as they engage and embrace those generations. In session three, participants are given an introduction to narrative theology, why the Elder's story needs to be heard, and reflection on God's presence in their lives through the framework of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Narrative theology is important to this project because it supports the process of faith seeking understanding through stories of the impact of grace on

individuals and the community in which they live and serve. It is hoped that this theology will serve as a scaffold that supports the Elder's narrative.

Also built on this theology are Walter Brueggeman's concepts of orientation, disorientation and reorientation. The faith narrative is developed through these concepts much like the rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution in any type of dramatic story. The stability of orientation is the beginning of the believer's story, a story that will ultimately reach a point where some form of tribulation disorientates the believer, the main character in the narrative. The Elder in present reflection will remember this past trouble not only because of the resulting disorientation, but also for the presence of God that was with them through the disorientation. Coming through the tribulation, the Elder believer comes to the part of the story that recalls the breakthrough to stability that also serves to reveal God as the God of that situation. The testimony offered to the community by the Griot is a call to faith proclaiming that if God has been faithful to me and brought me through to arrive at this place in life at this age then God will exhibit faithfulness in oncoming generations as well.

Session four raises consciousness of the gifts that participants possess through the 2005 Motivational Gifts Survey by Dorena DellaVecchio. This is not a part of the triangulated data. It serves as another prompt to effect a change in attitude by allowing the Elder to see themselves in a fresh way. The survey is more recognition that aging does not diminish, but seasons the gifts that God has given them. Exploring Titus 2 serves as a moment of reflection on the emphasis on teaching from generation to generation within the Christian community. Combining the historical precedent of the African Griot and the need for the prophetic, teaching voices of the Elders in the Christian community, the researcher guides the participants through the process of crafting a definition of the prophetic elder in the role of Griot in the Christian community.

The idea of different voices figures prominently in this study as Elders are made keenly aware that more voices that carry the prophetic power to encourage faith and vision are desperately needed for the restoration and preservation of faith in their community.

In session five, a study of the Griot as a carrier of "old speech" that binds a community together is presented. This serves as another connection to the tradition and legacy embodied in those who arrive at the age that allows them the right to be called an Elder. Narrative theology is revisited, framing the Christian Griot's life story as God's story, or how God has literally written their lives. This serves as a bridge to introduce the strategy of story linking. Story linking as an expression of narrative theology is taught as the practice of placing the participant's story along-side the Scriptures by reflection on self identity, social context, interpersonal relationships, life events, and live meanings. Story-linking is practiced with Psalm 139.

Session six concludes the project sessions, encouraging the Elder with the need for their story emphasizing the four primary networks of the Elder: biological, geographical, vocational, and recreational. There is further discussion of the Prophetic Elder as a witness not only to the Church but to the unchurched as well. Participants are prepared for documentation of the Elders' stories by discussing examples of the questions that will be used to document their faith narrative. Standards of oral history archival practice will be adhered to as these narratives may be accessed digitally and correct formatting will be essential to their future use.

The expected results of this project are a thorough understanding of the Biblical foundation of the call to the Elders' generation to be the voices that call oncoming generations to enter and continue in the faith of their mothers and fathers. The Elders will exhibit an understanding of the application of their prophetic voice as illustrated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14.

The Elders will have reconnected with the historical and Church precedents for their positions as Elders and will have thoroughly reflected on their faith narrative and its link to the Scriptures. As Griots prepared to engage other generations, Elders will have an understanding as to why oncoming generations are leaving the Church or are frustrated with the Church. They will overcome their own stereotypes of other generations as well, enabling them to more easily embrace them as a part of the Christian community.

The researcher also seeks to disprove the stereotypes of seniors as lacking the capacity for in-depth study. It is the belief of the researcher that the seniors in the context have proven that they have the vitality and clarity of mind as well as the physical, social, and emotional ability to engage in this project in a manner that will yield significant change in their lives as noted in the journal entries and transcribed discussions. The belief that seniors have hardened hearts toward generations that follow them is also a stereotype that must be dispelled. The seniors in context not only have children and grandchildren with whom they are actively involved, but some also work in the local school divisions where they come in contact with youth and young adults on a regular basis. Far from being overly critical, the seniors in the context show evidence that they seek relationship with the oncoming generations. This project will improve their interaction and empower their prophetic voice that will not only be recorded for the future, but also shared in the present.

The researcher intends that this work reach its full potential as Elders' faith narratives are heard and preserved in digital archives for future generations. Initially, the success of this program will result in the preparation of participating members of New Living Stone Christian Church to embrace the role of a biblically mandated Prophetic Elder that is equipped with the biblical, historical, and theological knowledge that instills within them the confidence that they

not only have a handle on the "God moments" in their lives as understood through the lens of narrative theology and the concepts of orientation, disorientation and reorientation, but also to be a Christian Griot in the Christian community and the sphere of influence with which they come in contact with daily.

Triangulation of data is achieved through the concurrent linking of the pre-survey results, the journals and video documented discussions, and the post-survey results. The context group started with ten participants. Only two participants left for reasons associated with the construction and implementation of the curriculum. These were the eldest members of the context who, being raised in an agrarian region focused more on the need of their presence on the farm, did not advance through school as far as some in the group. Thus, they were not as comfortable with the journal writing as others. This occurrence is reflected upon in Chapter Six of the dissertation. Others left progressively due to previously planned trips. One had to leave to check on property out of town, which the researcher understood was done on a periodic basis but did not realize at the beginning of the study that there would be a conflict. Another participant left due to a pre-planned cruise. Once again, the researcher was not informed until the last minute. Finally, on the last day of the sessions a participant could not come due to food poisoning contracted the night before.

While these departures were unfortunate, the researcher argues that, for the size of the context and the purposes of this project, the goal of validity has been met and the findings of this methodology are dependable, transferable, and can also be confirmed.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Paramount in the development of this project, "The Prophetic Elder: Restoring the Voice and Legacy of the Silent Generation as Traditional Griots in a Christian Community," was the preparation and equipping of the Elders of New Living Stone Christian Church with the foundations, knowledge, and encouragement with which they can embrace their call to speak in a prophetic way to the oncoming generations in the Church and their community. They will have stirred within them the desire to fulfill what the researcher has called in the past "Titus 2 ministries." These ministries envisioned the manifestation of the relationships illustrated in Titus 2 in our congregation, with seniors desirous to come alongside oncoming generations to instill the traditions of the faith, share the narrative of God's presence and acts in their lives, and share pragmatic instruction and wisdom, documenting their faith narrative for the benefit of future generations on current audio and visual recording apparatus.

Soul Stories by Anne Wimberly further supports the conjunction of the Bible, Christian Education, and stories of faith and everyday experience. Wimberly writes of several key factors that compose every story, factors that are significant to Christian experience. These factors are the foundation of a process called *story linking*, connecting the everyday story of the believer to the Bible, African American heritage, and God's call to act on what He has revealed in the situation. Karen B. Tye, in *Basics of Christian Education,* cites Wimberly's story-linking model as a significant strategy in Christian Education that stresses faith formation within the people of

God. According to Tye, story-linking can serve to help people "come to the fullness of knowledge needed to be committed and faithful disciples in the world today." [1] Wimberly encourages life reflection that leads to dismantling the culture of the unheard by creating a culture that encourages life reflection and the sharing of stories, concerns, and hopes.[2] As this occurs those members of the Church who are going through tough trials can look to the Elders and access the wisdom they possess either in person or through archived narratives and the Church uses modern technology to create accessible stories that can be consulted repeatedly.

The Elders in the researcher's context had never before considered the scriptures or the historical and cultural implications presented to them in this project. The idea that they could possibly be a prophetic voice seems to have intrigued them. While every member of the congregation could not participate for scheduling reasons, each one signed the pledge of support for the work the researcher was doing.

The ten participants that began the project began freely sharing among themselves the stories of their experiences both positive and painful. They were eager participants, showing by their involvement and engagement in the class that they were willing to participate in, and be changed through, the project. They were quite open to receiving the teaching that affirmed their biblical responsibility to share of themselves at their age, feeling they have an obligation because of the long life God had kept them through by his mercy. They realized that as the congregation grows this preparation will be important to the future ministry of New Living Stone Christian Church (referred to hereafter at NLSCC) as the researcher envisions an atmosphere that facilitates relationships across generational lines that can at times be quite rigid.

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[1] Karen B. Tye, *Basics of Christian Education* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000), 51.

[2] Anne Streaty-Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*. Kindle Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), Location 249.

This will be the difference in the atmosphere, worship, and activities at NLSCC. Intentional ministry to Elders coupled with a code and a culture that honors the Elder and empowers them to pour out their years of experiences as plans to formally and informally share their stories is a part of the stated vision of the church context.

The sessions were held at True Vine Missionary Baptist Church in four weekends from September 8th to October 6th 2012. True Vine is located in the same contextual community as New Living Stone Christian Church. NLSCC worships at the United Jewish Community Center of the Virginia Peninsula complex, which is not open on Saturday due to the Jewish Sabbath. Dr. Irvin Melvin, Pastor of True Vine and a United Theological Seminary graduate allowed the researcher to hold project sessions in one of the classrooms of the church. Ten participants began the sessions with the pre-survey and began an inductive Bible study of Genesis 4:1-7 and Titus 2:1-8. Each session was approximately two to four hours in length. The sessions were entitled: *The Biblical Mandate, Why Are You Silent, Why Can't They Hear?, No Longer Silent, The Elder as Griot: What Are My Gifts, What Can I Teach?, God's Story Through A Christian Life,* and *A Prepared Prophetic Elder: I Love to Tell the Story.*

Participants were engaged in group Bible study, discussion of focus questions associated with the text; reflection questions entitled '"Take a Moment"' and '"Consider This"'. Answers to these questions were either shared with a neighbor or the response recorded in their journal. Participants also reflected on the characteristics of their generation and oncoming generations presented in the research of David Kinnaman and Ed Stetzer. Their books *You Lost Me* and *Lost and Found* were senior friendly as the concepts in these texts were not hard to understand and contained a wealth of information that served to inform and change attitudes about relating to young people as noted in journal entries of participants.

They affirm that their story is important, they have wisdom to impart, and there are ways in which they can better facilitate relationships with the generations coming after them. The researcher has grown to be an even stronger advocate for the abilities of seniors in this age to study and apply what they have learned. Stereotypes of seniors that are incapable of active and in-depth learning are strongly rejected in the researcher's ministry as the researcher has seen time and again active, vibrant seniors successfully engaged in life-long learning in classroom settings, also holding insightful conversations and exhibiting positive reactions to moment of discovery. Focus activities at the beginning or in the course of the sessions included quotes, Gospel and inspirational music and video from significant websites. Central to the focus activities were the archives from the StoryCorps Griot website. The participants listened and reacted to several of the stories. Sharing these audio recordings served to illustrate how an oral history comes together, tells a story, and gives a message of hope to encourage the next generation. The recordings also served to make the participants more comfortable with the idea of sharing their own stories; building confidence that it really can be done. At the end of each session participants made entries into their journals that served as qualitative data to correlate with the pre- and post-survey and video recordings of session discussions.

Discovery Process and Field Experience

Eight women and two men began the researcher's study. Ages ranged from early fifties to eighty-three years of age. All participants took the pre-survey. Questions were presented to measure the perception of each participant of their initial attitude towards the need for Elders, as an integral part of their discipleship, to be active members of the Church through the meaningful sharing of their God story, and the faith and wisdom the years have stored up in them.

Students met in a classroom setting around a table close together to enable discussion and sharing of experiences.

The researcher began session one with the Biblical foundations scriptures to teach and illustrate first God as the ultimate Prophetic Elder, the Ancient of Days, who chooses to intervene in the life of Cain, one of God's distraught creations whose emotional state has made him vulnerable to sin. Participants were asked if they could identify with Cain and if so do they remember a significant Elder in their family, community, or Church who intervened with reassurance and wise counsel. Next, participants studied the relationships in the Christian community on Crete found in the letter to Titus. The example and teaching of the Pastor set the tone for relationships in the community. Those relationships involve the teaching of practical lessons and social norms by older members of the Christian community. Participants were then asked to identify similarities and differences in the Christian community they are familiar with today and the community illustrated in the text. They were also asked if they believed the teaching and relationships described in the text existed in the present day Church they are familiar with. Responses included stories of feeling outcast or oppressed by step-parents or other relatives. Some remembered a childhood experience or early adult life situation that caused pain or depleted a measure of their self-worth. Some told of a family member or other individual in their lives who became a voice of wisdom and encouragement that lifted them back to a place of confidence and higher esteem. One participant shared that, because of his childhood without a positive father figure and constant moving, it was a good while before he experienced Prophetic Elder figures in his life in the personage of his great-grandmother, grandfather, and eventually his father-in-law.

Having laid the foundation of the Biblical mandate, the session continued with teaching on the cultural precedents in general and the presence and function of the Elder/Griot in African culture. The unique and important role that Elders play in the Christian witness of the Church with teaching on the term "prophetic" as illustrated in an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14 was presented. Quotes from the article *Hearing Voices* by Reginald Blount were read and discussed among the participants. After discussion, journaling took place. These revealed the teaching did what it was intended to do. The oldest participants stated in their journals that the teaching made them want to change themselves as well as open up their lives and help someone in return. They reflected on the wisdom that they shared with their own children encouraging them to give their best and give God the glory. The researcher regrets that these participants left after the first sessions. The lesson learned here that was not cited in any of the literature that the researcher consulted was that it cannot be taken for granted that seniors are capable of participating in an education program that requires a heavy written component. These participants left because they were uncomfortable with the amount of writing being asked of them. They later expressed to the researcher that while they thoroughly enjoyed the class, it was difficult for them to put their thoughts down on paper because of their level of educational experience. The shared that they worked in fields and held jobs from an early age and did not go very far in school as the reasons for their difficulty in writing. The researcher was told that they would have stayed if they had been allowed to give oral instead of written responses. The researcher observes that this misstep violated the whole intent of the project which is to record an oral history. The narrow view of the scope of the research model contributed to this thinking as the researcher did not consider that the research model could have some flexibility.

Their responses would have been documented in the qualitative data recorded on video. Their daughter left due to changes in her work schedule. She works as a nurse and was moved to a weekend schedule that prevented her from continuing.

Session two is entitled *Why Are You Silent, Why Can't They Hear*. The sessions continued with seven participants after withdrawal of the eldest members and their daughter. Session two examined the characteristics of the Silent generation and the oncoming generations. After a description of their generation was given participants were asked if they agreed with what research has said about them. Participant ten noted in his journal that his generation's silence is attributed to the increase of sin in the world and that no one really listens anymore. He also believed the Church was not doing enough to be a voice in the community. Participant 8 journaled that she agreed that her generation are hard workers who simply do what needs to be done and they feel that they don't need to toot their own horn for recognition. Other participants echoed the same sentiments. The participants were then shown from David Kinnaman's *You Lost Me* attitudes that other generations held concerning the Church. Participant 8 observed that interactions between older people and younger generations can be complicated by the fact that Elders don't always give young people a chance to express themselves. When asked if they felt a responsibility as an Elder in the Body of Christ to interact with oncoming generations there was agreement that there was a need to advise oncoming generations without criticism and that Elders have a responsibility to teach, encourage, and remind them that God is always with them and will never fail them.

In session three, entitled *No Longer Silent,* participants were introduced to narrative theology and understanding God's presence in their lives through the concepts of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Participants understood narrative theology as "God-talk" about

their lives and that in order to tell their unique story they must understand just what their story is. When asked by a "take a moment" question if they believed that they had counsel to give and a story to tell, each participant journaled their belief that they did have a story that would teach a life lesson. In general, family stories needed to be told in order to pass on particulars such as where family traits, interests and ideas come from. One participant described his stories as "moral anecdotes" that should be told for their practical usefulness and application. Session three exhibited some of the most painful moments of the sessions. Narrative theology combined with an examination of God's presence through orientation, disorientation, and reorientation brought to the forefront very painful experiences. Participants examined the definition of each stage and were asked to discuss and journal about how they experienced the stage of disorientation. There was not one dry eye among the participants as they discussed and wrote of such moments as caring for a dying husband, father, or mother. They wrote of miscarriages and of coming to grips with a lifetime of caring for a child with mental disabilities. They wrote of coming to a new place, being a newly-wed, and feeling alone in an unfamiliar place. Each participant also discussed or wrote of how they came to peace with God through prayer, Bible study, or simply remembering being taught from a young age that God will not put more on you than you can handle which gave one female participant the strength to defy doctors' suggestions to institutionalize her daughter because in their opinion the family would not be able to give appropriate care. Yet each participant came to the reorientation story with a sense of being stronger in faith. Not only did they confess this strength, but they believed it is part of their responsibility to bring this story to light.

Session four introduced the synthesis of the African concept of a Griot into the definition of the traditional Elder as a Christian Griot in the faith community. By session four there were six participants in the project. One participant departed the project due to a previously scheduled vacation. The session revisited the Titus 2 foundation scripture, highlighting the repetition of the word *teach* in the text as well as the words *train* and *encourage*. Each participant highlighted these key words and continued focusing on the purpose of teaching from a Biblical perspective bringing forward such ideas as teaching to keep shame from coming to the Word of God, the maintenance of the Christian community, and the equipping of generations to carry on and maintain consistency in the faith. At this time participants took the *Dorena DellaVecchio Motivational Gifts Survey*. The purpose of administering this survey was to further encourage participants to see themselves as disciples with God-given gifts. The survey served to reinforce the confidence of participants that they possessed the necessary gifts to fulfill their prophetic call. The categories in question are perceiver, server, teacher, encourager, giver, ruler, and mercy. Participants scored moderate to high in the areas of mercy and giving. Participants saw themselves as solidly moderate in other categories. Only participants one, two, three, and four scored themselves low in a category. Participant one scored low in the areas of teacher and ruler. Participant three scored low in the area of server. Participant four scored low in the area of perceiver. Participant six scored low in the area of teacher. From the group discussion of the scores it is determined that this exercise served to enhance the participant's self-perception of their abilities and that a moderate or even low score in a category would not deter them from moving forward in identifying themselves with the role of Elder and Griot. Using a definition of Griots as West African storytellers and the Titus 2 text the participants discussed and synthesized a definition of the Christian Griot that would be finalized in the next session.

In session five the definition of the Christian Griot was completed. The project lost another participant due to a pre-arranged trip to care for a property out of town. Before creating the final definition, the participants read and discussed the italicized passages of an article called *Listening Passage.* These portions highlighted the importance of listening to Elders, learning values and place in society, the Griot as a living library, and the idea of the Griot as one anointed with what is described as "old speech". Each participant then journaled a response to a "consider this" question about the old speech they believed they possessed. Each participant wrote of their "old speech": the possession of practical stories and pragmatic wisdom, the lessons of faith and dependence on God, and old sayings that contained warnings and valuable advice. After this the definition of the Christian Griot was finally fleshed out. The Christian Griot, according to this group's definition is, "a prophetic elder who, through their spoken and collected stories, passes on a living faith by building relationships with the purpose of sharing and documenting their knowledge, wisdom, and experiences that call oncoming generations to trust and serve the living God." They were asked to define the mission of the Christian Griot in their own words. The group concluded the Christian Griot's responsibility in part is letting oncoming generations know that God's word is sufficient to keep them today just as they experienced in their lives. The Christian Griot is to share knowledge, wisdom, and experiences with the outcome of teaching oncoming generations to live as examples of ways to honor God and carry on traditions that made the older generations strong and steadfast in their living.

The group then revisited narrative theology during this session in preparation to do an exercise in story linking. They understood part of the result of narrative theology as Christian testimony that "Once I was lost and blind in Adam, now I have been found and clearly see in Christ."

The Christian Griot is understood to be telling not just their story but their role and experience in God's story. The Christian Griot is also understood as the one who challenges individuals and communities to see God as the author, controller, and finisher of their story. They practiced linking themselves to the 139th Psalm. Each participant linked themselves in a way that acknowledged the reality of God and the power of God to keep them through everything from their own bad choices to grief and tough times. They acknowledge that they did not always know that it was God, but faith and trust in God let them know that God had a plan.

In session six the participants analyzed another audio file from the StoryCorps Griot and were introduced to a framework for understanding how far and wide their impact can be by examining their networks of primary relationships as presented in *The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Modern World.* Unfortunately, the morning of the last session one more participant had to drop out due to illness. The remaining participants reflected on their biological, geographical, vocational, and recreational relationships and how to put Prophetic Eldership into practice in these areas. They also examined a segment from *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* that assured them that, according to research, their presence and testimony is still welcomed in mainstream society contrary to popular belief. A telling statistic on the need for sources of inspirational guidance showed that not only was the Christian religion still seen as relevant and viable but that members of oncoming generations would rather be inspired by a real person. They would rather have a relational encounter with a person above anything else. Participants were then introduced to the manner in which their stories would be collected and preserved along with the types of questions that would be asked. After a final prayer, participants journaled that they were more confident in their ability to impart wisdom to oncoming generations without fear or shyness.

The data in the post-survey (Appendix D) verifies this claim showing that changes in attitude and self-perception moved from varying degrees of uncertainty to solidly positive opinions about their discipleship and their confidence in the relevance of their wisdom and experiences and the need to share them.

Outcomes

It is very important to recognize that the seniors in this context came to the project with a relatively positive perception of themselves that was somewhat contrary to the expectation of the researcher who believed that there may still have been some residual hurt from past experiences. The researcher saw this in the first couple of years of ministry in this context, but from the evidence in the survey's the researcher can conclude that the ministry of the researcher has effected positive change in their own perceptions of themselves and their gifting. Participants have a very strong belief in the duty of the believers to study the Word of God and find out how to apply it to daily living. Each participant falls in line with the image of the active senior who is still sharp in mind and, while having experienced some health challenges, is still very able to participate in an active lifestyle as noted by reasons participants gave for having to leave the study. They travel, manage property, and remain in the work force. What became clear from the researcher's experience with the oldest participants, the first to drop out, is that it is critical to be cognizant of the senior as learner and be careful of making assumptions about comfort level and capacity to participate. The Christian Education literature consulted by the researcher did not address the possibility that Elders of the Builder generation who are from rural societies may still have been tied to the land and a life dictated by the farmiug calendar which may have limited their ability to attend school and finish k-12 education or higher.

It is important that future literature reflect this, as active seniors are present in the Body of Christ and should be appropriately accommodated to suit their learning needs.

With each session, participants freely shared orally with one another the highs and lows of their lives. It affirms that they are comfortable sharing orally, fulfilling the necessary requirement to become a Prophetic Elder and Christian Griot. The participants are truly concerned about the oncoming generations of the Church and their community. Many had already taken the role of Elder in their relationship networks. Yet they became much more cognizant of this role in the Christian community; that their speech becomes a faith narrative with God as the author and that, along with telling their stories, a call to turn to God and keep the faith should be part and parcel with it.

When challenged to link their stories to God's word and frame their lives within the concepts of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation the participants found that they still held strong feelings about their experience. They were able to support one another and affirm God's love and faithfulness to them. They also recognized that they already been in situations where they had shared their stories, which served to reinforce the argument that their stories aren't just stories but faith narratives that are important to the Christian community and worthy to be documented for future generations.

The researcher believes that the presented hypothesis has been quantitatively and qualitatively proven. Participants have shown measurable growth as seen through their journal and survey responses. They have acknowledged and embraced the role and responsibility of the Prophetic Elder as Christian Griot, zealous to share but also willing to document the knowledge and wisdom they have stored over the course of their lives. A Church that implements this Christian Education model will fulfill the need for creative ministry among seniors.

This model will restore the respect and value of Elders in their community by providing opportunities to build relationships between seniors and oncoming generations. The Church will also recognize the importance of archiving faith narratives as an expression of narrative theology and preservation of the legacy of faith that Prophetic Elders possess that should be recognized as a portion of the inheritance of the Christian community.

An Interview with Dr. Anne Streaty Wimberly

Dr. Anne Streaty Wimberly is Professor Emerita of Christian Education at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Wimberly is also the director of the Hope Builders Academy, a program that seeks to empower young people in part by bridging generational gaps. Dr. Wimberly's lecture at the researcher's second doctoral intensive greatly inspired and influenced this project. Dr. Wimberly's contributions to the field of Christian Education in the form of her books *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* and *Honoring African American Elders: A Ministry in the Soul Community* have also been cited and the strategy of story linking found in *Soul Stories* was applied in the researcher's project implementation. The interview adds greatly to this chapter on the state of the art in this area of ministry as the researcher inquires of this expert in the field concerning reasons for the generational divide between Elders and oncoming generations, how re-envisioning of ministry to Elders can take place, the need to restore the voice of the Elder in the Church and community, and the validity of the curriculum created by the researcher that seeks to prepare Elders for the role of Prophetic Elder and Christian Griot. What follows is the complete narrative including the personal sharing between the researcher and Dr. Wimberly that laid the foundation of the

researcher's concern for seniors and those who minister to and care for them. The following is the transcript of this interview that was a part of the researcher's field experience.

QUESTION 1: The researcher argues that those identified as oncoming generations in the project have embraced digital sources of knowledge and direction, forsaking inspiration from an Elder. What do you think of the argument? Please elaborate.

Ann Wimberly: I certainly agree and see clearly that there is a digital divide and the digital divide is because of course the young generation are comfortable with technology. Whereas the older you become the less comfortable they are because that was not a part of their early generation, and it's difficult to connect with that kind of communication method. However there are other reasons why there is a divide a general divide and that is because our churches have become age segregated churches. Even where young people are part of congregations, typically there is a separate place for them, they don't worship together with elders, often times there are separate services and even in churches where digital means are used, i.e. screens pulled down, scripture is on a screen, songs or hymns or gospel music is on a screen. Elders find it difficult to relate to that because they are used to the hymn book and they're used to hymns. So the general divide is because of an age segregation in congregations that also is seen in the everyday community. Communities are age segregated. Kids go to schools that are separate, they go to recreation that is separate and elders now if they're in their homes they may raise a grandchild, there they've got to relate but when they don't, they are often alone. Or many of them are in long-stay institutions, nursing homes and so on where that did not used to be the case. So the age segregated community I think is a vital reason for the divide and of course the digital divide because young people are certainly more free to use technology and more comfortable with it. So those two things I would like to mention.

The other thing is that because young people have become more comfortable with technology, they are less comfortable and become less and less comfortable with face to face relationships. And not only do they need it, but the elders certainly need it. And if we don't really address that our young people will continue to shy away from face to face and become, I think, even more angry and volatile because they don't know how to do it. And when you try to connect with them and they don't know how to do it, they become very hostile. So that's another dimension of the issue. I also think that churches don't do enough to think outside of the box to invite the conversation. Back in the day, there were always those family night suppers. Today even if you have a congregation that's mostly seniors, there's nothing to stop us in those churches, and those are proliferating, from inviting family members to come for family night dinners or to come for special occasions where all generations meet together. In addition, thinking outside the box, brings us to envisioning, imagining ways to connect with the face to face relationships. I'll stop there because I'm going in another direction than you want me.

Researcher: No actually that's my second question. I'd love for you to continue if you can with a bit on how this re-envisioning can take place.

Ann Wimberly: Ok, alright let me go ahead then.

QUESTION 2: In your book *Honoring African American Elders* you write that churches should have an intentional process and take time to re-envision ministries to Elders. How do you see this re-envisioning process taking place?

Ann Wimberly: Ministry imagination means that you are open to thinking outside the box of ways to create the face to face relationships. Of course one of those ways that I just mentioned is the family night dinner, special occasions where you invite whole families in of all ages. But the other thing I think especially in congregations where you have predominantly older adults is to

make sure that when visitations are done that there is some contact made with other members of the family so that they are present at the time. You can simply say in pastoral visits I'd love to come and visit you would it be possible to invite another member of your family or young person in your family so we can sit together and talk together. So that's a way of helping the other members of the family that's modeling for them and helping them to see the importance of coming together and guiding that conversation so that it becomes an ongoing kind of thing. Where you have younger people in the congregation, there's nothing to stop us from saying to the young were going to have a day or weekend where each one of you is going to be invited to go out into the community of elders in our church and take a pad and pencil and invite them to tell their story and to come back and present that story to the congregation on a special day. Or, you ask a young person to go to a homebound elder or one who isn't homebound who is ambulatory with a Bible, a devotional guide, and a newspaper, and they sit and they engage them in conversation. Now that's been done in some congregations so I know it works. And it's a powerful way of making that connection. Those are just some ideas of things to do.

The researcher: That's wonderful. I can definitely see how each of those is something that is very doable and something that, if we just think about it, it can be done. It can be scheduled very very easily.

Ann Wimberly: Now with regard to the voices of the elders, it just depends because you have to sense who is willing to openly share, because you always want to respect where they are in terms of their views of themselves and the capabilities of themselves. But to have elders to read scripture or to be the liturgist for to what I call "de-centralize the pulpit", by having a prayer in the congregation. And by that I mean getting small groups, a couple, or twos or threes sitting in the congregation asking them during the prayer time to share with one another a prayer concern

or praise report and then having them say prayer right where they are. Now what that does is to encourage the communication among the elders. Because there needs to be the cross-generational relationship, but there also needs to be the peer relationship because that is where support is going to come predominantly in this age segregated society and church that we live. So that kind of what I call "de-centralization of the pulpit" so that prayer becomes a prayer of the people is one way to engage the voices of the elders. Now if you have young people in the congregation it's another way to get the young people involved. It they're sitting separately ask them to go and sit by an elder and engage them in that praise report or prayer request and go into prayer exactly where they are. That's another idea.

The researcher: You started talking about the voice and my next question is about the elder's voice. Just to put a pause there, I have actually done a treatment, six sessions on preparing elders to tell their story so I've actually plan on taking oral histories of the elders but I also want to try to match elders that have certain experiences and have gone through certain experiences and triumphed in certain experiences with those from other generations who are going through the same thing. Such as caring for a parent or seeing that care is being given to a sick spouse. I have that in my congregation, older ladies, seniors in my congregation who have gone through that process of losing a husband to illness and having to take care of that husband. My mother my family had to give care to my grandmother who had Alzheimer's disease and we kept her in our home as long as we could before we simply had to go to an institutional type of setting.

Ann Wimberly: We had the same journey. We brought my husband's parents to live with us and actually built on an addition on our house for them and they stayed there. They lived for four years; his mother had Alzheimer's. So we know that journey very well. It's also the journey in a mobile society of elder parents or grandparents who live a distance away.

When we were teaching at Oral Roberts University my Dad was terminally ill with colon cancer. So I had to travel every other weekend to be in Ohio with my mother and my sister to help care for him to see about him and see about both of them. And so there are many people in that situation as well who have moved away and need to connect with aging parents. There really does need to be preparation for that, for families who are at a distance, families who are up close, families who have limited means. Families who have to make choices about long stay institutions and how do you make that choice and who do you involve in it. Of course you've got to involve the elder in that as well. And choices about what to do upon the death of an elder, the will living wills, all of those areas are areas that we often don't think about, but are really necessary to think about but are really necessary to think about and prepare whole families in those areas.

The researcher: Right, it can take a lot of stress out of the process. Not knowing can be stressful enough and then you've got a whole lot of different ideas coming to the table whereas you could have taken care of that in the beginning. You know I remember what my mom went through and the one vivid thing that I remember is that there seemed to be no ministry from the church that supported her. I wasn't angry about that but it's a part of the pain that I carry from that time as I was seventeen years old and I had to take care of my grandmother before my parents got home from work. I was the one that picked her up from her house; I stood in front of the house and waited for her assisted living bus to drop her off. I had to make sure that she went to the bathroom and did all the things that she needed to remember to do at seventeen years old. So getting her over to our house and keeping her from trying to visit her neighbors when she was at our house, to keep her from walking off, you know that sort of thing. It's very vivid for me and one of the major reasons why I took this project on because I lost my grandparents before I got a

chance to sit at their feet, so to speak. My grandfather was stricken with leukemia and he was hospitalized and of course my grandmother, you know we saw the sunset of her life through Alzheimer's and losing all of those memories. You know my grandfather was a boxer, lettered in boxing at Hampton University in 1938 and that's the reason why I box as a workout today because I looked at his pictures and articles. We still have his boxing letter certificate. I actually made a t-shirt out of it so I could wear it. Striving for connection with the past but not ever having heard the voice, you know there is always going to be something missing. But one of the things that I strongly believe when it comes to the elder, and that's why I called it The Prophetic Elder, is that the elder should have a prophetic voice in the Christian community and in their community. One of the scriptures that I use as a foundation, well both of them, Genesis four, God's conversation with Cain where God seeks to intervene with Cain to give him direction in dealing with his emotions, that sin is trying to take advantage of. While Cain didn't of course heed God's voice, but who is more an elder than God himself, the Ancient of Days? Then I go to Titus 2 where the Christian community is in conversation as well as teaching one another with the older women teaching the younger women and the older men being an example to the younger men. I believe that Christian communities are actually teaching communities and one thing that we don't do a lot is, as you said when you talked about a de-centralized pulpit, I think the community on Crete where Titus was actually somewhat de-centralized. At some point Paul told Titus to fulfill his role, but it was also as if Titus was passing on his role to the women and men in the community as well. In a rather tough community actually because Paul talks about the Cretans, I've used that word before. It's probably rather old speech today to call someone a Cretan. I've used that before myself. But the question and what I would really love for you to share your opinion on is abont elders being that prophetic voice not only calling generations back

to faith and back to the traditions of faith in God, but also the sharing of the pragmatic knowledge and wisdom is missing really in our communities. Could you elaborate a bit on that? We said a little bit about the voice, but that pragmatic knowledge and wisdom and the preservation of their voices for the future….

QUESTION 3: The researcher argues that the Elder's voice a prophetic voice, should not only be preserved for the future but heard today because Elder's pragmatic knowledge and wisdom our missing in our communities. Could you share your opinion about this and ideas on how to bring this voice back.

Ann Wimberly: There are several ways to look at it. Certainly by virtue of the fact that an elder has arrived at eldership means that they have gone through a lot. They've experienced that trials and tribulations of life. As black elders they definitely have experienced trials and tribulations of life and have arrived at the point where they are by some means, and typically those in the Church have arrived at it because they have developed and used and based their lives on a strong faith that really is missing in so many instances among younger generations today because they are so alone. Elders knew and experienced a community of grace and a community of faith and therefore the voice that they must have and they must be given is to tell the stories of how they got over. How did they arrive at where they are? What was it that made it possible for them to live as long as they have? What would they say to someone else about how to do that? What would they say about racism and overcoming it? What would they say about relationships and difficult relationships? What would they say about marriage? What would they say about transgressing difficulties within families? Those are the kinds of questions that could be asked of a senior adult because they know, they've experienced it and believe it or not, and I know you do, young people really need that, not just our adults and young adults but our teens desperately

need that and in fact really do crave it. We think they don't because we see they are separated, but they crave to have someone say to them, really, hold on, God is present, this is how I did it, let me share this story with you about some instance if I might, they really do want and need to hear that. They have questions that they want answered and it's not just the pastor who can answer the questions or say I really don't have an answer to that but let me tell you a story about how I tried to answer that. So the elders must have that prophetic voice which tells the story, again, of how I got over.

The researcher: that's excellent. I've seen that same thought and line of belief in a book called You Lost Me, David Kinnaman's work on why youth are leaving the church, as well as Ed Stetzer's Lost and Found, the Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them also echo the same thing that you're speaking about right now. That's great triangulation for me to have your voice added to that and it's something I greatly appreciate.

Ann Wimberly: Well I must tell you it's what I have experienced time and time and time again in the ten years that I have directed the Youth Hope Builder's Academy at ITC that theological program for high school youth. And these young people (hmmm) the questions and the quandaries they have. There came a time in that program, it's an intergenerational staff that we have, there came a time when a high school youth looked at me and said "gramma, may I call you gramma Ann?" And I said why yes and then I just kind of teared up and I said why sure and that became their words for me. And one of the things that I learned from them is that to reach out and hold them and to say to young people not just, because they ask my story and I tell my story, but to say to them I love you. Our youth crave for elders to look at them and say I love you, you are special, you are God's child you are a valuable creation of God you are somebody, you are going to be somebody.

The elders have a particularly important prophetic voice to affirm, encourage, and stand with the young people of today and they need it and want it more than ever before.

The researcher: This is powerful. And my whole angle is to prepare seniors for this. In some of my research not only do youth have stereotypes of seniors but seniors in large measure have stereotypes of youth as well. Each generation needs some breaking up of the soil, so to speak, to plant some seeds for the need for this to occur and to remind all of us that the Church is one community and one body and to have it fractured in such a way that separates such great wisdom from those who not only need it but seek it, it really is something that keeps us from living up to what the Church is supposed to be.

Ann Wimberly: Let me touch on a couple of other things because there are elders who are so critical of young people that when they speak it's a turn off. So we do have to prepare seniors to look at where they were when they were young, and to look at the young people of today and to see what is there that is in need of positive reinforcement, affirmation, encouragement and so on other than a scathing critique that really evolves into more separation than there was in the beginning. That's one point. A second point is that I believe that there are seniors even though they are uncomfortable with technology because they have not been around it are open to learning it and it's possible to engage seniors who show some interest and some encouragement to get involved. One of the things I did some time ago, I was so resistant with cell phones because I said I don't want that attached and to live with that cell phone ringing 24 hours a day but I did it then I said okay, I'm only going to use it only a particular period of time, well now of course I keep it on all the time. But I was also very resistant about texting. But I discovered that that's how I could communicate with the kids. And then I wasn't going to get on Facebook. But then I said alright I know that they're on it. So I ventured out and I got on Facebook.

I set the birthdays up. The first birthday greeting that I sent to one of the youth and the kid wrote me right back and said grandma is that really you? And I said well believe it or not it is really me; now tell me what's going on in your life? So I do believe that it's possible, it's exciting, and it's freeing, to ask elders are you game? How about lets go to the library where they've got computers or maybe there's on in the church, let's look at this thing and see what's possible. And I think you might be surprised.

The researcher: Oh absolutely as a matter of fact I have a friend who's graduating with me who is in another group and his project dealt completely with bringing seniors into the digital age and they did everything from basic word processing to internet searching and I believe he did something with texting, facebooking, and such things as that and he had very measurable changes in attitudes about technology as a result of his research. It's definitely going on among us budding church leaders that to be cognizant of the need to bridge that gap in that way. I didn't want to hold you long; I have one more question…..

QUESTION 4: The researcher has created a curriculum that seeks to prepare seniors for the role of Prophetic Elder and Christian Griot. Would you agree that seniors need preparation for such a ministry? Is it "too much" for seniors to handle? Do you see it as a biblical responsibility in light of scriptures such as Titus 2 where Titus is told to prepare Elders to teach younger generations?

Ann Wimberly: In terms of the classroom part, I think many of our elders are more accustomed to a classroom setting from Sunday School and Bible study than we would care to think. So a classroom is certainly appropriate and comfortable for them. The more difficult part might be engaging in conversation because with our seniors there tends to be a greater deference to the authority of the teacher and the role of the teacher in telling. So discussion is sometimes difficult. I'll never forget my dad, (I'm a PK) in my dad's church in Ohio he held the first Bible study and

he once opened with prayer and he wanted to be sure that the members, those participating in Bible study, knew and came to know that it was their Bible study and their prayer meeting so he asked one of the elders to open with prayer and the elder looked at him and said, Preacher this is what we pay you to do. So that showed my dad right away where the seniors were in terms of their respect of authority, but we can bring seniors into an understanding that we believe in the ministry of the people. And to engage them in the understanding of the relationship between Elijah and Elisha and the passing of the mantle, there is a biblical story for example that can be used and for me gives a Biblical mandate or at least a biblical basis for the role of seniors with younger folk. And of course Timothy is a classic example, New Testament example. And of course over all the role of Jesus with the disciples and the question of how do we prepare, encourage, nurture disciples if there are not mentors to do that? And in the prophetic tradition I think the elders are the ones to do that. I think that's where I want to go with that.

The researcher: A little about what I did, I'm a teacher. I teach 8th grade Civics . . . I developed this curriculum with some diversity of strategy in mind with reflective questions, using a tool online called the Story Corps Griot, it was developed by National Public Radio (NPR), and they have some two to three minute vignettes that have seniors telling stories of triumphs, tragedies even from divorce to dealing with the murder of siblings, there's a number of different things out there. But what I did was a while back I prepared my congregation to study the bible. They love the inductive method of Bible study. They love the inductive method of Bible study. I have a rather capable bunch actually and very active. As a matter of fact I lost some of the folks participating in my sessions because they were doing anything from going on cruises to checking on their properties out of town. So I have a very active congregation. But I did run across something interesting that I really don't see in the literature as far as Christian Education for

seniors, and that is being mindful of accommodation, especially when you run across or have a generation that may not have progressed as far through school especially if they came from a region that was very agrarian environment and it was more important to be near home and working with the field than in school. Maybe they only got to tenth grade or twelfth grade but they certainly were successes through life. And I had some journaling as a part of my research triangulation. I actually had my oldest couple be uncomfortable with that. And I failed to accommodate by simply saying you could just talk and just discuss. You can still be involved as opposed to doing the journaling piece. And they told me later well if you had said that we certainly would have stayed around. So that's something that I'm missing from the things I've read as far as Christian Education, the books, the articles, etc. That's something on Sunday and Wednesday you have to be mindful of with both younger people and older people because the same issues they carry throughout their lives or in school, whether it's difficulty reading or difficulty writing due to motor skill deficiencies. And seniors can probably be somewhat apprehensive about that and showing a weakness like that.

Ann Wimberly: that's called being sensitive to multiple intelligences and to do that you have to have multiple approaches that can be used….I'm trying to think of….photo voice or photo history. And that is to invite elders to take photographs of things around them. Their home their family, their favorite objects, things that remind them of their past which doesn't require writing, it requires shooting an instamatic camera. So that's one way. Another way is to use a recorder and have them speak into a recorder. Both the photo voice and the recorder are ways of documenting for them their journey that becomes a keepsake for them that they might want to pass on to the next generation. And another one is to have either another senior who likes to write or a younger person to sit and listen to the story and they do the journaling and they give it

to the elder as a gift, or they put it on tape as a gift or they take a picture of the senior and they write the story and it becomes a gift. So there are a number of ways to do it so the multiple intelligences are taken into consideration.

The researcher: wow that's great. That's something you really don't see. I've been working on this for a couple of years and I have just never seen anything that speaks to remembering these accommodations for older adults who still want to be involved in Sunday School and still want to be involved in Christian Education, there's really no compensation or accommodation for seniors, you still have to be cognizant of loss of hearing, loss of vision (AW: cataracts, glaucoma and so on). You've just fueled my passion for this kind of ministry even further and those are all of my questions. I greatly appreciate your time and if there's anything you'd like to close out with I'd greatly appreciate any words you have.

Ann Wimberly: Well I would just like to pray that God will continue to guide you in this very important endeavor on behalf of God's people who have grown in age and grown in wisdom and that God will give you all you need to complete this process and will be before you, behind you, above you, beside you, and beneath you in the road that lies ahead and I pray that in the name of Jesus, Amen.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

A participant shared the story of the time that she was able to at act as an Elder to someone going through the same loss that she had experienced. Upon arriving at her job she noticed a co-worker who did not look well. The Elder was told that the co-worker's husband was dying and was having trouble coping under the circumstances. This Elder sprang into action sharing her faith, her story, and her desire to be of assistance to her whenever possible. This same Elder encountered another woman much younger than herself who was also going through the trial of caring for a husband with a terminal illness. This time the co-worker was much younger and she asked the Elder how she was able to get through it. The Elder was again able to say without hesitation that it was her faith, prayer, and the God-given revelation through her prayer that she could let her husband go because she had done all that she could for him. This is just one example of how the goals of this project, to prepare seniors to become Christian Griots who use their prophetic voices to exhort and encourage, are being practically met in the everyday experiences of those who participated.

This endeavor has fulfilled what Dr. Fred J. Boddie, Jr., the researcher's father in the ministry, said so long ago. The seminary experience will "crystallize what is already there." The researcher is emboldened by the work in this project to a more passionate advocacy for senior adults in and out of the Church. The researcher is even more cognizant of and concerned with the generational divisions within the Body of Christ.

The vision of congregational unity takes creativity to nurture. It is not a given that multiple ages in the same room, the same sanctuary, or under the same ministry is a sign of unity. The work of overcoming stereotypes of one generation towards another will be arduous. The researcher has chosen to begin with the Elders versus the younger generations because of the ever present need to hone ministry skills that serve the Elder generation, and this was borne out by the research and experience of the researcher in this project. Elders are much more cognizant of their mortality. The older they become, the more family and friends they will see pass away. Attendance at the high school reunion becomes thinner and thinner. At one time, they were masters of the world's technical innovations.. Now, science fiction has become reality before their eyes. They deserve to have their needs tended to as any other child of God. They have a voice that should be heard. They have long endured hurts that have never been resolved and healed. The researcher is now firmly entrenched in not only being a voice for them but a facilitator of greater unity in the Body of Christ that can begin when the community gathers to hear the faith and life story of the Prophetic Elder.

The researcher is not so much surprised as reassured that a major congregational hurt noticed at the beginning of pastoral ministry to these people has been healed. The researcher observes that the participants have become confident disciples, no longer hesitant, silent, and uncertain. Trust has been extended to the researcher as Pastor in large measure because of the researcher's passion to see the people as much more than just a congregation of older Christians but as members of the Body of Christ who are still capable of fulfilling the call and operating in the gifts that God has ordained for them to make manifest at this time in their lives. The researcher's passion to minister to seniors and see them lead empowered lives is even greater than at the beginning of the project.

The researcher is grateful that as others have heard of the work of this ministry, it has provoked thoughtful exchange of ideas and some even considered the possibility of implementing it in their own contexts.

The editor of this project has enlisted the researcher to work with her in preserving her grandfather's faith narrative. The researcher is excited about the great potential that this project has to effect change in self-perceptions of seniors and provide a unique ministry that brings seniors back to tangible involvement in the Christian community that will result in greater unity between the generations in the Body of Christ.

The seniors who participated in this project are an extremely active group. So active that three participants were lost due to work schedule, a pre-planned vacation, and the need to attend to a family property out of state. While they were present, they were extremely engaged and focused on the teaching, but their insight and knowledge departed with them and the richness they would have added to the conversation was lost. Those who remained were able to complete a thorough study of the foundation scriptures and answer reflective questions through discussion and journal writing. They were not hesitant when asked thought provoking questions and welcomed the opportunities to analyze and engage in deeper discussions. Framing their experiences in the stages of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation helped them organize their story so that it becomes a spiritual autobiography. Narrative theology and the strategy of Story-linkingstory-linkingstory-linking were also useful in helping participants see their story as God's story. The researcher sees these elements as key to the self-examination of an Elder's life that contributes to their transformation into Christian Griots in the Church and community.

The researcher's context is almost all members of the Builder generation. While the researcher firmly believes in his call to minster to this generation, he realizes that opportunities must be created for those trained as Prophetic Elders to fully realize the expression of their calling and gift. It will be important that intentional planning is done that will bring those identified as oncoming generations in contact with the Christian Griot.

The researcher has already begun to arrange those interactions and implement the recording of the faith narratives. The researcher further envisions that the Prophetic Elders will be able to speak into the lives of individuals who are going through specific situations that the Elder has already overcome. These recordings could very well become a part of unique discipleship/counseling resource archive that can be accessed for future generations who will surely go through the same issues. It is a part of the vision statement of New Living Stone Christian Church that it will bring generations together so that Elder saints can share their faith and life wisdom with oncoming generations. This project is celebrated as partial fulfillment of that vision.

The researcher also observes that the process of reflecting through orientation, disorientation, and reorientation brings to the surface painful memories from which the participant may or may not have completely healed. It is important to ensure that the participant has come to a place where sharing the story will not cause a traumatic moment but will remain the testimony that it was meant to be. This raises an opportunity to prepare ministries of worship, teaching, and counseling that bring about healing and closure.

The researcher also must look at the opportunities lost in this implementation. The departure of participants due to his failure to engage in discovery of each learning style is the most regrettable. It is appropriate at the outset of any study where multiple means of engagement

are presented that the teacher understands the limits and comfort zones of the students. The researcher realizes that while the participants may have been there in part to support the work, clearly the researcher was not there just to implement a project but to teach for individual transformation which best takes place when the learner can use the means of learning with which they are comfortable.

The researcher also mistakenly set boundaries that were not necessary. It was believed by the researcher that the parameters set for validity of the data collection were so rigid as to make accommodation for learners impossible. The choice of journaling as a data collection strategy was assumed to be an activity that each learner could engage in without difficulty. This assumption caused the researcher to miss an opportunity to operate in the very essence of the project's goal, the digital preservation of the oral wisdom, stories, and faith of a generation.

As the researcher reflects on the implementation, it becomes clear that teaching about the role of the Elder as defined in this project is a necessary part of Christian Education and Urban Ministry. This project has the capacity to provide another much needed strategy that can assist in answering the crisis in the Christian community and African American culture. A fractured community that is out of touch with its roots is in danger of dying. The best of the culture of a community is preserved in the minds of the Elders. The creeds and codes of the community, the signs of respect, and the nurturing that comes from belonging to an extended family that reaches back from generation to generation are assets that should be passed on , but something happened along the way that caused ears to become deaf and eyes to become blind. It only takes one generation to stop listening and a whole people can lose their way. The communities in urban settings are in great need of the prophetic voice of the Elders.

The Church is a great place to start hearing the wisdom of the Elders through creative Christian Education that brings communities together in a way that recalls history and traditions that oncoming generations should not merely be exposed to but should have intentionally instilled within them. Dr. Ann Wimberly, Dr. Carroll Freeman, Sr., and Dr. Howard G. Hendricks, scholars in the field of senior ministry, all agree that creative ministry toward seniors that calls seniors to be examples, to work to unify generations, and which calls oncoming generations to honor age, and for the aged to honor themselves, must be designed and executed. Each generation has its God-given assignment according to the age and level of faith maturity to which they have attained. Since, according to accepted research, seniors are expected to live longer, healthier and as a result, more active lives, they should expect that their Church will show them what the Bible teaches concerning how they should live for God in later years and allow them to remain active contributors to the success of the ministry.

Our culture in general, and African American culture, in particular is losing its great love and knack for oral communication and our ability to tell a good story. Even the current generation of Hip Hop and Rap artists pale in comparison to the originals artists who were not only directly influenced by the rhythms of Jazz and Blues, but who also told a good story, a story influenced by their urban experience and the rhythms – of story- tellers with their roots in the great tradition of African Griots. The works of current artists not only insult the ear but also the intelligence and character of the hearer. They are aren't even white-washed sepulchers, it is easy to see their substance and message can only lead to the death of another generation cut off from its original grounding in truth and righteousness. Who is their audience? Members of the oncoming generations who must be engaged and challenged by the story of Elders! The very ones who most need to hear their Elders' stories and be given a chance to choose that same new

life that brought the Elders a mighty long way. Christian Education and Urban Ministry that engages oncoming generations with a real and substantive story of faith and life, failure and success, love and loves lost, how a man should love a woman and how a woman should love a man, of righteousness and holiness can be found at the feet of a Christian Griot.

The Christian community on the island of Crete presented to us in the letter to Titus provides a compelling argument for the way in which Christian communities can maintain the uniqueness of a people that stand as a body called out of the world, sanctified unto God, and serve as a training ground for godly living and godly relationships among believers that will set an example to the world. The researcher argues that this project, "The Prophetic Elder: Restoring the Voice and Legacy of the Silent Generation as Traditional Griots in a Christian Community," is an example of how the biblical model found in Titus can be effectively adopted and utilized. It is a model of Christian Education that can reach every level of any Christian community. As today's older generations are once again elevated to the respect they deserve, their voices will no longer be silent. Their voices will not only be heard but adhered to by oncoming generations who are being instructed in the authority of the scriptures as the final rule of faith for the Christian community.

These sessions were certainly not fully comprehensive and could very well lead to other Christian Education opportunities. Understanding the needs of the oncoming generations in order to bring them back to faith can and should be taught in depth so the atmosphere can be set to welcome those who might consider making the congregation their home for Christian fellowship and worship. An understanding of gifts and talents is always needed in order for believers to hone in on God's purposeful design for their life and service. Story-linking has been shown to be effective in making the Bible's story connect with the believer's faith and life narrative.

Dr. Ann Wimberly's strategy is effective in Bible study, Sunday school, and other Christian Education formats. Dr. Wimberly's ideas on de-centralizing the pulpit to foster relationships between generations, answers the call for creative re-envisioning of the Church's ministries. The Church serves the God of all creation and *all creativity.*

When we limit our ministry to the same schedule, the same program, and the same order of service year after year, do we truly honor the God who created galaxies we have yet to find with a telescope and the depths of the ocean we have yet to explore? The Church that serves a limitless God should cringe at the thought of putting limits on itself that could very well blind eyes from seeing and stop ears from hearing when God seeks to do a new thing in and through the Church. This attitude allows the Church to realize what it was meant to be, a sign of the reality of God and Christ, a foretaste of the glories and fellowship of heaven, and an instrument used of God in the salvation and transformation of those who believe.

The researcher is convinced that research in this corner of the field of senior ministry should certainly continue and branch out into other areas of focus. Certainly the Church should be interested in interpersonal communication, what fosters it and what blocks it. The attitudes of older and younger congregants should be examined to help the Church recognize and counter threats to a cohesive Christian community that come from poor communication. Emma Justes rightly focuses on the development of the listening pastor, a skill so very important to our ministry. How effective can a community be at meeting its own needs and sharing its life with one another if the community itself has inadvertently built barriers to communication among its members? Justes, in *Hearing Beyond the Words,* speaks of listening that supports reciprocity between pastor and congregation. This listening becomes nonreciprocal when the pastor has the need to be heard but finds there are no hearers to be found The Church can very well be

developed into a listening community. After all, in the General Epistle of James, is written a verse that speaks of confessing sins to and praying for one another. This is truly an example of de-centralizing the pulpit! Congregations can certainly learn to be more hospitable in their listening to one another and research in better communication among believers is certainly warranted.

Now more than ever, interventions are needed in our communities that will serve to help members of generations who are in trouble, hurting, and expressing their pain in unhealthy ways causing fractured communities and life-altering, and at times life-ending, consequences. The Church is in the community, its own Jerusalem, and is called to raise its voice to the end that those that have ears to hear may hear the Prophetic call to repentance and faith. Within that Prophetic call is imbedded the still small voice of the Spirit of God that will, as the Church pleads with men in a human voice, reach down into the inner man and do the heart pricking work and the individual soul surgery that brings about deliverance and healing to the one that will receive it. While Cain may have yielded to his temptation and allowed sin to master him, it is not so with everyone. The voice of the Prophetic Elder, the faith narrative of a Christian Griot, could be the difference that is needed in a life that needs hope and direction.

APPENDIX A

PRE AND POST TEST INSTRUMENT

Please Complete the Following Survey

Please answer these questions as truthfully as possible. We will return to this survey at the end of the study to measure changes in your perception of how God can use you as a Prophetic Elder.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Agree Somewhat 4= Undecided 5= Disagree Somewhat 6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

1. As a senior, I am a valuable part of the Church of Jesus Christ

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat 6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

2. Seniors should be keepers of the faith and cultural traditions of a community.

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat 6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

3. God's word gives me responsibilities to fulfill at this age/stage of my life

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat 6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

4. I understand the definition of the term "prophetic"

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat 6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

5. I know when God has been present in the good and bad experiences of my life

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat 6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

6. I believe I can make a connection with younger people of today

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat 6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

7. I can encourage struggling people to have faith in God to help them

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat

6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

8. I know and believe that I can use my spiritual gifts

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat

6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

9. I am uncomfortable sharing my life story

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat

6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

10. I can teach younger people the life lessons I have learned

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat

6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

11. My walk of faith has meaning and should be shared with others

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat

6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

12. When church members are experiencing problems, I should be a voice of wisdom and encouragement

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat

6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

13. My wisdom and experiences should be preserved for my family

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Agree Somewhat 4=Undecided 5=Disagree Somewhat

6= Disagree 7= Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX B

TRAINING MODULES 1-6

TRAINING MODULES 1-6

THE BIBLICAL MANDATE

Genesis 4:1-7 (NLT)

Now Adam* had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, "With the LORD's help, I have produced* a man!" [2] Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. [3] When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. [4] Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, [5] but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

[6] "Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected? [7] You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master." [1]

Who can deny that our oncoming generations need to hear a call back to righteous living and the fear of the Lord? Who is called to this task? The Elders of the Christian community are called to such a task. The life of one who has "come this far by faith" is a story that needs to be told because it is an authentic, non-fiction, and full of what oncoming generations like to call "real talk". As an Elder in the Church you have trusted God many times. And, there have been other times when you have tried to make it on your own. Times of faithfulness as well as doubt and fear are a part of your faith story or narrative and God would have you share your story with those who need assurance that they can make it with the Lord.

Since you are called to this task, God is giving you the knowledge and resources to carry out His plan, a plan that is yours to carry out at this stage of your life. Your equipping with the knowledge that this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you starts with its foundation in the Word, with God as the example of the Elder coming along side one who is about to walk

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[1] Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (3rd ed.) (Gen 4:1–7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

through a door through which he cannot turn back. We start with an unaccepted man and his encounter with the ultimate Elder.

Unaccepted and Angry!

Study the copy of Genesis ch. 4. With another group member read verses 1-7 and write answers to the questions below in your journal. Do Your Best!

- Which of the brother's was born first? How could this have contributed to Cain's anger?
- Can you think of two differences between Cain's offering and Abel's? (There is no right or wrong answer, what is your opinion?)
- Can you relate to Cain? Do you remember a time when you were unaccepted? How did you feel? Did anyone help you through your feelings? Did it make a difference in the outcome of your situation?
- How is Cain called back to acceptable living before God?
- How would you explain verse 7 to someone? (Take it for what it says, remember it's your opinion)

[2]

Discussion Time:

Coming back together as a group, discuss your answers to the questions above.

The Example of the Ultimate Elder

God himself comes along side Cain in an effort to bring Cain back from the brink of destruction. God is the ultimate Elder. He is not called the Ancient One (Dan 7:9) for nothing! As Elders, God has left you an example. First, you are to be watchful for those who are troubled. Those feelings are a gateway to sin. Next, you are to use your wisdom and gifts to suggest an alternative, a direction that will lead the troubled one back to God. Then, give a warning. God said to Cain, "watch out!" You must do the same.

With this example from God Himself, you are officially informed that you are called at this stage of your life to take the mantle of an Elder. God has allowed you to continue to live this life because you are tasked with sharing your life and wisdom with oncoming generations.

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[2] Charles Home and Julius Bewer. The Brothers Offer Sacrifice in *The Bible and Its Story, Volume 1: The Law, Genesis to Leviticus*. New York, NY: Francis R. Niglutsch, 1908.

Titus 2:1-8 (NLT)

As for you, Titus, promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome teaching. [2] Teach the older men to exercise self-control, to be worthy of respect, and to live wisely. They must have sound faith and be filled with love and patience.

[3] Similarly, teach the older women to live in a way that honors God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers.* Instead, they should teach others what is good. [4] These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, [5] to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes,* to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.

[6] In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely. [7] And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. [8] Teach the truth so that your teaching can't be criticized. Then those who oppose us will be ashamed and have nothing bad to say about us. [3]

Community Responsibility

God has shown us that Elders are called to individual responsibility. In the New Testament, a body of believers is called to form a community and within that community are Elders who are called to carry sound teaching to the oncoming generations. In the Christian community on Crete, Titus was tasked with promoting, "…the kind of living which reflects wholesome teaching."[4] We should note that the word wholesome carries with it connotations that give the term greater weight than its modern day meaning. That which is healthy, either physical or mental health, is connected to its meaning. Wholesome is also connected with being balanced, not tending to go to one extreme or the other. It can also speak to the health of the soul. Ancient Greeks believed a healthy soul lead to the leading of a virtuous life while a sick soul led to vice. The teaching then was meant to have great impact on the life of the hearers. The conduct of the community was to have its foundation in this wholesome teaching.

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[3] Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (3rd ed.) (Tt 2:1–8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

[4] Ti 2:1 (New Living Translation)

Out of this teaching that lead to "healthy souls", the older men and women were to possess a character and live a lifestyle that not only marked them as Christians but they were to teach these things to younger generations themselves.

Elders at the Center of a Healthy Community

Open your Bible to Titus 2. With another group member read verses 1-8 and answer the questions below in your journal. Do Your Best!

- Describe the members of the Christian community in the text.
- In your own words, what impact is Titus' teaching supposed to have on the members of the community?
- Compare the Christian community in the text with the Christian community that you are familiar with today. What are the similarities? What are the differences?
- Do you believe sound teaching as described in Titus 2 is missing from the Church today?

Discussion Time:

Coming back together as a group, discuss your answers to the questions above.

THE HISTORICAL PRECEDENT

The innovative concepts of the emerging generation will be void of direction without the foundation laid by those who have already passed this way[5]
Dr. Michael A. Battle, Sr.-U.S. Ambassador to the African Union

African American culture is steeped in oral tradition. Down through the years, family histories, community traditions, and skills needed for survival in everyday life have been passed down from generation to generation. Whether it happened during a visit with "Grandpop" or at a family reunion where the stories told by the family matriarch had even the youngest hanging on every word, the custom and tradition of the Elders of the family and community sharing their life lessons has been around for centuries.

Take a Moment: Do you remember family or community Elders who shared life lessons or stories with you? Briefly share that memory with someone near you.

The Cultural Precedent

African-American history has its start on the African continent where the contrast between European and West African ways of recording history, culture, and values is significant. The men and women story tellers of West Africa are called Griots (men) and Griottes (women). With memory alone they retain the story of their people through narrative and songs. The wisdom, stories, and genealogies of people or groups of people were literally embodied in the Griot/Griottes.

When the time comes another is selected to carry the stories forward to the next generation.

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[5] Timothy Tee Boddie, *Wisdom of the Sages: Conversations with the A.C.D. Vaughn Senior Statesmen 1996-2005 Hampton University Ministers' Conference* (Chicago, IL.: Urban Ministries, Inc., 2007), 1

The training is described this way,

> Training for a griot begins within the family unit, with boys and girls learning from their griot parents, and then moves on to a formal griot school, and then to an apprenticeship with a master griot. Both boys and girls can train to be griots, although griottes may have less freedom to travel and train because of family obligations.[6]

Take a Listen: On the PBS series *Wonders of the African World*, Dr. Henry Lewis Gates explains the history of a Griot ***http://www.pbs.org/wonders/Episodes/Epi5/5_cult1a.htm***

The role of Griot in the African American experience was adapted from its African roots. What a Griot was in West Africa became the Elder of the African American slave community. They are the ones who survived not only the Middle Passage, but the acclimation of body, mind, and spirit to a new climate and new way of being as well. The sayings, beliefs, and values a community held dear were communicated through the Elders. Elders were said to possess "mother wit", a type of intuition coupled with the ability to judge and respond to different situations. The Griot/Elders story would contain not only personal stories and genealogies, but the social norms of the community and the survival tools needed when interacting with Whites. The respect for Griot/Elders that was a normal part of African culture was enlarged to cushion the mistreatment and disrespect Elders received nnder the institution of slavery.

The modern Griot/Elder can be anyone who is not only willing to retain and share a transformative story, but is one who willing to freely give of themselves and their resources, though they may be limited, to help and encourage generations to come. There are great challenges faced by the modern Griot/Elder. Respect and interaction with Elders by oncoming

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[6] Joanna Lott, "Keepers of History", *Research: Penn State* 23, no. 2 (May, 2002) http://www.rps.psu.edu/0205/keepers.html (accessed April 5, 2012)

generations has fallen to what scholars have called cultural submission. Instead of fighting for the traditions and values of people and community many have given in and allowed "substitute wisdom", knowledge gained not from those with proven faith and life experiences but from sources on the World Wide Web and inexperienced peers and social groups in cyber-communities.

But there are great resources available that will open a window into real wisdom and real life experiences. We will take a look at one from National Public Radio called, Story Corps Griot. This is an audio archive with a unique feature: with its Do It Yourself Story Kit, you can create your own audio archive and submit it to the Story Corps to have it stored in the National Archives. The purpose of listening to these examples is to show the impact on lives of sharing and the importance of preservation.

Listen and React: we will listen and react to three stories from the

Story Corps Griot archive: Friendship Grown by Quilting, A Chance Encounter, A Friendship Grown by Quilting

http://www.npr.org/templates/search/index.php?searchinput=griot&sort=match&tabId=text

THE CHURCH PRECEDENT

The people of Israel sought their identity through links with the past. They have found an assurance in their identity as, "the threatened present generation…connects with the horizon of reference points from the past." The present day Church and our communities are no less in need of this same assurance of who we are and the capacity we have for endurance and success as a people of color and a people of faith.

The Church is a unique creation of God in the world with the unique mission in the earth of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. The people who make up the Church are a unique

group and an important part of this unique group are the Elders. Having lived a full life, experienced progressive maturity in the faith, and having gained wisdom from years of experience, Elders of the church have authority to call oncoming generations to live a life that not only pleases God but depends on God for answers to the struggles and troubles they face in a variety of circumstances. A quote from the book *Teaching in the Community of Faith* reads:

> They teach because they keenly sense their responsibility to serve as the link between ancestors and descendents. They teach that people might not be trapped in an eternal present. They teach that the faithfulness of the "saints" of the past might inspire those who will forge the future. They teach so that the resources of the past will not be lost.[7]

Each person is the historian of their lives and those who live a life of faith believe that God has been working in, through, and around them. Passing on a personal history of faith is as important as passing on the history of the Church itself.

The body of Christ is made up of individual members who should be encouraged by personal faith histories. Elders are in a great position to give some of the best encouragement to hold fast to the confession of faith.

Think of some of the songs and sayings used to reflect on our lives:

- "Down through the years the Lord's been good to me."
- "He's bought me from a mighty long way."
- "Take me back dear Lord to the place where I first received you."
- "When I look back over my life and I think things over…."

Take a Moment: Reflect on the history of God in your life. When did your relationship (your history) with God begin?

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[7] Charles R. Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 155.

What It Means to Be Prophetic- Hearing Voices

According to the *Dictionary of Bible Themes* the Bible speaks of schools of prophets. They were used by God to influence others.[8] 1 Samuel 10:5-6 reads:

> When you arrive at Gibeah of God, where the garrison of the Philistines is located, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the place of worship. They will be playing a harp, a tambourine, a flute, and a lyre, and they will be prophesying. At that time the Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them. You will be changed into a different person.

Now the classic Old Testament prophet is modeled after Moses. He is made a prophet by God and stands before the people with the authority of God. The prophet can tell what events in history mean for the people. They may confront leaders as well as, like Moses, act as a law giver. Prophets may proclaim, predict, or do both. Prophets also acted as intercessors pointing the people to God while praying for the intervention of God on their behalf. In the Old Testament 3 Hebrew words can be translated to mean prophet. One term is used to express that prophets are called or who calls to people in the name of God. Another term speaks to a prophet as a member of or operating in the midst of a group. A final term speaks of a prophet operating as an individual. A prophet also could have acted as a court historian for certain kings of Israel.

Take a Listen: Sam Pollard talks about the importance of storytelling

http://video.pbs.org/video/2180965972/

We look to 1 Corinthians 14 for a New Testament application of what it means to be prophetic.

> But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them. [4] A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church. [9]

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[8]Manser, Martin H. *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser, 1999.

Paul is speaking of much more than predicting the future. Does everyone have the ability to predict the future? Certainly not, but what is written in this passage concerns the believe that, "everyone could proclaim the gospel and so produce learning and comfort or exhortation."[10] This prophetic speech, contrasted in this chapter with speaking in tongues, is most desirable because everyone can understand and is edified by it. Prophetic speech passes on knowledge and is also used to teach. Prophetic speech, according to the text, has the convict everyone including unbelievers. It is the prophetic speech, not speaking in tongues, which will bring about worship and acknowledgment of the presence of God among believers.

We can conclude that believers across a broad spectrum can speak in a prophetic way according to this interpretation. This speech will be even more convincing coming from an elder, a more senior member, of the congregation. When properly understood, speaking in a prophetic way is not out of reach and it should be done to contribute to the growth in faith and knowledge as well as to call the hearer, believer and unbeliever, to a closer walk with God.

In closing, consider these quotes from the article *Hearing Voices* by Reginald Blount,

> My mother worked hard in caring for her children but never earned a lot. Her conversations often spoke of her difficulties and struggles, but her voice also spoke of being your best and never giving up. My mother would tell me often "I don't care what you do [speaking about career and vocation] just be your best and do your best." My mother continually offered me a voice of affirmation to pursue and accomplish all that I could.

Now consider this next quote from the same article,

> Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church offered me voices of grace and love. They spoke of a God who loved me just as I am. They spoke of a God who considered me special and part of God's family. Their voices spoke of a God whose greatest desire for me was to share the love that was lavished on me with someone else. The voices of Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church nurtured me and affirmed me and encouraged me to be all that God had created me to be.

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[9] Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (3rd ed.) (1 Co 14:3–4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

[10] Charles D. Isabell, Glossolalia and Propheteialalia: A Study of 1 Corinthians 14

Now consider this final quote from the same article,

> But not all of the voices I have heard in my life were supportive, loving, and affirming. I have experienced many contradictions in the voices I have encountered. I have experienced contradictions from voices growing up within the African-American community. I can particularly remember hearing contradictions regarding education....as I attempted to strive to do my best academically, I was ridiculed by my peers, and accused of wanting to be "white." You see, to do well in school, to talk "proper" meant "actin' White." These contradictions in voices cause me great pain, emotionally and physically because I found myself in fights due to peers wanting to beat me up because I was "smart"..."actin' White."

Consider the three voices here. How do they differ? What is the message of each one? How do the voices in the first two quotes counter-act the voice of the third quote.

Time to Reflect

Now, please write an honest reflection in your journal on the teaching you have heard today. Please reflect not only on the content, but the way it was delivered to you as well. What is your response to the bible study, the cultural precedent, the historical precedent and the church precedent for speaking into lives prophetically as a griot/elder for your church and community?

SESSION 2

WHY ARE YOU SILENT, WHY CAN'T THEY HEAR?

"If nothing else, we Silents were a quiet, successful bridge-generation between the heroes and the hubris. And we deserve more than a simple nod as we pass from the world's stage."[11]

For the second session of the project Elders will:

- Review information from the previous week
- Examine the characteristics of the Elders Generation: Why Are You Silent?
- Examine the characteristics of the Oncoming Generations: Why Can't They Hear?
- Answer key questions and write thoughts/impressions in their journal
- Hold final discussion for the day and close

Dianne Reeves: Better Days

Story Corp Story: The Measure of a Father

Finish the Biblical Mandate- Session 1

Let's consider these images (showing Power Point, open discussion and sharing)

[11] Carl Jensen, "Step Aside Boomers, Silent Generation Has Much to Offer," *USA Today* November 22, 2010 http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/letters/2010-11-23-letters23_ST_N.htm (September 20, 2012).

WHO ARE THE ELDERS?

Elders are commonly known as the "Builder" or the "Silent" generation. They are seniors born before World War II. They have strong values and faith and are strong supporters of the local Church.[12] Some foundational characteristics of Builders include:

> The principles, philosophy, and values of the Builders were shaped by their experiences in the 1920's, 1930's, 1940's.
>
> Builders experienced the Great Depression, World War II, and the transition from a rural to urban lifestyle.
>
> Builders have seen and been impacted by industrial growth, mass media, federal, state, and local legislation.
>
> Builders are general conservative in their faith and values.
>
> Builders are further described as hard workers, frugal savers, patriotic, private, dependable and intolerant.
>
> Builders have a greater commitment to the church and enjoy Bible study, worship out of duty, and they attend Sunday School.
>
> As Elders you are considered an important asset to the Church because you have:
>
> Skills, motivation, discernment, reliability, influence, and are accessible and spiritually conscious.

Take a Moment:

Do you agree with the description given by this information? What do you disagree with? But why are you the Silent Generation?

Let's look at this entry in Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_Generation

[12] Alvin Lewis, *Strategies for Educating African American Adults* (Chicago: Urban Ministries,Inc, 2006) 22

WHO ARE THE "ONCOMING GENERATIONS"?

The "threatened present generation" could connect up with "the horizon of reference points from the past.

The oncoming generations are the "Busters". They were born in the late 1960's to early 1980's.[13] They are influenced by media and technology. Their values are not considered traditional and they are currently involved in raising young families and are concerned with the possibility of having to provide for the health and well-being of aging parents.

These generations have had faith challenges. Some have become disillusioned with organized religion and the traditional church while claiming to hold on to faith in Christ. Here are some of the issues they have with the Church. According to *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith*, they find church to be:

Overprotective. The impulses toward creativity and cultural engagement are some of the defining characteristics of the Mosaic generation that are most obvious. They want to reimagine, re-create, rethink, and they want to be entrepreneurs, innovators, starters. To Mosaics, creative expression is of inestimable value. The church is seen as a creativity killer where risk taking and being involved in culture are anathema.

Question: How can the church peel back the tamper-resistant safety seal, making space for imaginative risk taking and creative self-expression, traits that are so valued within the next generation?

Shallow. Among Mosaics, the most common perception of churches is that they are boring. Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults, leaving them with no idea of the gravity and power of following Christ. Few young Christians can

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[13] Ibid., 22

coherently connect their faith with their gifts, abilities, and passions. In other words, the Christianity they received does not give them a sense of calling.

Question: How can the church nurture a deep, holistic faith in Christ that encompasses every area of life?

Antiscience. Many young Christians have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible. Yet they see the mostly helpful role science plays in the world they inhabit—in medicine, personal technology, travel, care of the natural world, and other areas. What's more, science seems accessible in a way that the world they inhabit—in medicine, personal technology, travel, care of the natural world, and other areas. What's more, science seems accessible in a way that the church does not; science appears to welcome questions and skepticism, while matters of faith seem impenetrable.

Question: How can the Christian community help the next generation interact with science positively and prophetically?

Repressive. Religious rules—particularly sexual mores—feel stifling to the individualist mindset of young adults. Consequently they perceive the church as repressive. Sexuality creates deep challenges for the faith development of young people.

Question: How can the church contextualize its approach to sexuality and culture within a broader vision of restored relationships?

Exclusive. Although there are limits to what this generation will accept and whom they will embrace, they have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance. Thus Christianity's claims to exclusivity are a hard sell. They want to find areas of common ground, even if that means glossing over real differences.

Question: How can the Christian community link the singular nature of Christ with the radical ways in which he pursued and included outsiders?

Doubtless. Young Christians (and former Christians too) say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. They do not feel safe admitting that faith doesn't always make sense. In addition, many feel that the church's response to doubt is trivial and fact focused, as if people can be talked out of doubting.

Question: How can the Christian community help this generation face their doubts squarely and integrate their questions into a robust life of faith?

Look at this simple Biblical example of an Elder advising and younger believer:

The Spirit-inspired interplay between generations is a common theme in Scripture. As one example, consider the story of Eli (the older generation) and Samuel (the younger generation) described in 1 Samuel 3. You may recall the episode. In the middle of the night, God calls to Samuel, but the young prophet-in-training repeatedly mistakes God's call for the voice of his mentor, Eli. Finally it occurs to Eli, after Samuel has interrupted his sleep several times, to instruct his protégé to say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Take a Moment:

Do we make interactions with young people more complicated than necessary? Have you ever advised someone to simply see if it is the Lord that is speaking?

Consider This:

Are we so caught up in stereotypical images of young people in this day and age that we have trouble believing that God is speaking to and through them? Do we believe our way is the only way for oncoming generations to hear from God?

WHAT DO THE ONCOMING GENERATIONS NEED TO HEAR?

The oncoming generations need to hear from the Elders in a way that allows them to feel that their feelings are valid. *You Lost Me* offers ways to bridge the gap. We will look at some of these highlights and discuss them.

Closing: What are your thoughts on ways you can interact with oncoming generations? Do you feel a responsibility to do this as an Elder in the Body of Christ?

Please write your final impressions on today's topics in your journal.

SESSION 3

NO LONGER SILENT

One of the great challenges facing leadership today is the lack of accessible wisdom from the elders... We sorely lack elders who are willing and able to offer wisdom to leaders
Robert M. Franklin- Crisis in the Village[14]

For the third week of the project will prepare Elders to step into the Griot role by gaining perspective on their own past and the activity of God in their life.

- Review information from the previous week
- Introduction to Narrative Theology and why the Elder's story needs to be heard
- Understanding God's presence in your story (Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation)
- Answer key questions and write thoughts/impressions in their journal
- Hold final discussion for the day and close

Listening again to the Story Corp Griot

http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/pepper-miller-and-her-husband-ronald/

Quotes Defining Narrative Theology

"interpretation of Scripture.... is not so much what a particular scholar writes as what a particular community of believers enacts."[15]

"We will need to remember that we did not create ourselves, that we owe what we are to the communities that formed us, and to what Paul Tillich called `the structure of grace in history' that made such communities possible."[16]

"Each of us has a story, we are told, a wonderful story that belongs only to us; it is our task to discover what that story is."[17]

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[14]Robert M. Franklin, Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007)

[15] Alan Jacobs. Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life (Stob Lectures 2006) 1. Kindle Edition.

[16] Alan Jacobs. Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life (Stob Lectures 2006) 2. Kindle Edition.

[17] Alan Jacobs. Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life (Stob Lectures 2006) 4. Kindle Edition.

"it is far more important for a Christian to keep a journal than for a businessman to keep a ledger: after all, the "account" we will be called upon to make before God some day is more consequential than any businessman's."[18]

Why The Elder's Story Needs to Be Heard

"Every real story ... contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller.... has counsel for his readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to be able to tell the story.... Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom. The art of storytelling is dying out because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out."[19]

Take A Moment

Consider the above statement. Discuss it with someone near you.

Now, consider this statement in light of YOUR life. Do you have experiences to communicate? Do you have counsel to give? Please answer this briefly in your journal.

Your story is important! But storytelling has been missing from the church. We, too, have become slaves to this age where people move through life too quickly to stop and listen. Our Christian community suffers for lack of wise counsel. We ask ourselves where storytelling has gone. Why is it missing? It may well be that quick fixes are tailored for the fast life that we live. Stopping to listen, reflect on what we have heard, and make plans to apply what we have heard is lost on us. What is clear from our study of the biblical mandate is that we have an obligation to tell our stories to the community. ***We are not only to tell them, but teach through them.***

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[18] Alan Jacobs. Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life (Stob Lectures 2006) 5. Kindle Edition.

[19] Alan Jacobs. Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life (Stob Lectures 2006) 8. Kindle Edition.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PRESENCE IN YOUR STORY:
ORIENTATION, DISORIENTATION, REORIENTATION
(Based on Walter Brueggemann's *Spirituality of the Psalms*)

Definition of Terms

Orientation: the beginning. A stable form of existence, life, and faith.

Illustration: Phil. 2:5-11 Though He was in the form of God….

Disorientation: A movement in existence, life, and faith from stability to instability brought on by life crisis, challenges or changes.

Illustration: Phil. 2:5-11 He emptied himself….

Reorientation: A position that brings stability back to life. This move does not return a person back to the first position of orientation. Transformation has occurred that has made the individual a qualitatively new person with a new faith perspective.

Illustration: Phil. 2:5-11 Therefore, God has highly exalted him…

Illustration in Baptism

Romans 6:3-11

Or have you forgotten that when we were (Orientation) joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? [4] For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. (Disorientation) And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. (Reorientation)

Orientation, Disorientation, and Reorientation represent movement in life through times of physical and emotional stability to instability brought about by changes that bring about a range of experiences from mild discomfort to deep suffering, pain or loss. A resolution to that which brought about the disorientation will bring about a reorientation experience that resolves the issues in the disorientation but leaves the individual changed through the experience.

Consider these phases of life based on orientation, disorientation, and reorientation:

Orientation

"Human life consists in satisfied seasons of well-being that evoke gratitude for the constancy of blessing…the joy, delight, goodness, coherence, and reliability of God, God's creation, and God's governing law."[20]

Disorientation

"Human life consists in anguished seasons of hurt, alienation, suffering, and death. These evoke rage, resentment, self-pity, and hatred."[21] It is a season of, "ragged, painful disarray."[22] This is the season of making our complaints known to God.

Reorientation

"Human life consists of turns of surprise when we are overwhelmed with the new gifts of God, when joy breaks through the despair. Where there has been only darkness, there is light."[23] We receive a, "new gift from God, a fresh instruction that makes all things new."[24] "The move of the season is transformational and not developmental; that is, the move is never obvious, easy, or "natural."[25]

Take a Moment

What do you think of this statement? "Human life is not simply an articulation of a place in which we find ourselves. It is also a movement from one circumstance to another, changing and being changed, finding ourselves surprised by a new circumstance we did not expect, resistant to a new place, clinging desperately to an old circumstance."

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[20] Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2002). 8

[21] Ibid, 8

[22] Ibid, 8

[23] Ibid, 8

[24] Ibid, 9

[25] Ibid, 9

Discuss with someone near you.

Now "plug in" your life to these movements of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Write briefly about times of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation as explained in the session. Write a brief reaction in your journal.

SESSION 4

THE ELDER AS GRIOT: WHAT ARE MY GIFTS, WHAT CAN I TEACH?

For the fourth session of the project seeks to prepare Elders through examination of the gifts, wisdom, and wit that they possess that may be passed on to encourage and guide oncoming generations.

- Review information from the previous week
- The Elder as Griot
- Titus 2: What are my gifts, what can I teach
- Answer key questions in a gift/teaching inventory and write thoughts/impressions in their journal
- Hold final discussion for the day and close

THE ELDER AS GRIOT

WHAT ARE MY GIFTS, WHAT CAN I TEACH?

As for you, Titus, promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome ***teaching****.* [2] ***Teach*** *the older men... to exercise self-control, to be worthy of respect, and to live wisely. They must have sound faith and be filled with love and patience.* [3] *Similarly,* ***teach*** *the older women to live in a way that honors God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers.** *Instead,* ***they should teach*** *others what is good.* [4] *These older women* ***must train the younger*** *women to love their husbands and their children,* [5] *to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes,* * *to do good, and to be submissive to their* ***husbands****. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.* [6] *In the same way,* ***encourage*** *the young men to live wisely.* [7] *And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind.* [26]

Song: I Have A Testimony

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[26] Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (3rd ed.) (Tt 2:1–7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Teach! From the leader to the older men and women from the older men and women to the younger men and women the call of God is for the community to teach. The word *similarly* holds the command together for both the older men and the older women to come along side the oncoming generation. They are to speak more than just words of life and wisdom. They are supposed to give specifics, the pragmatics of life. They share out of their experience what works. They are supposed to share things that build up the community and the relationships of the believers within the community. In *A Heart For the City* the role of a teacher as mentor coming alongside learners is described as, "a relational experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources." Your God-given resources have been learned over years and are ready to be deposited in a wisdom and solution starved world.

The Titus 2 text says specifically says that the teaching is meant to keep shame from coming on the Word of God. Our Christian community, while mighty through God, must be maintained through teaching. This teaching from the elders is meant to equip the younger generation to not only carry on but maintain consistency of the faith. The Elder will show the way forward, building relationship with the oncoming generations, building trust that will open the way to sharing knowledge. One cannot share or lead without relationships. The predecessor to relationship is the willingness to do what it takes to build relationships. Taking the time to understand and get to know those to whom you are sharing with (session 2) is essential. This oncoming generation is lacking much that elders grew up with. Once the relationship is established, age difference will not be a hindrance, it will be a great blessing. You will share knowledge with them. Yet, in sharing knowledge with them you will gain knowledge of yourself. Those who share in this exchange will then gain knowledge of God as the Holy Spirit gives revelation to and through each one.

Being the prophetic elder as griot in the Christian community adds another dimension to your call. Griots are, "West African storytellers. They are nomadic bards that travel from community to community keeping alive the threads of culture. Theirs is an oral storytelling tradition. The griot harvests and preserves the ideas and stories of a given culture and it is entrusted to them to pass along these stories."[27]

Consider This

We will take the above definition and revise it to create a definition of the Christian griot. Relate some of the terms to Christian experience as well as to the Titus 2 scripture.

[27] Antero Garcia. Teacher as Griot. The American Crawl. http://www.theamericancrawl.com/?p=954 accessed 9/28/12.

SESSION 5

GOD'S STORY THROUGH A CHRISTIAN LIFE

The fifth session of the project seeks to continue to prepare Elders to take on the role of Christian griot by:

- Review information from the previous week
- Examining Our Definition of the Christian Griot
- Revisiting Narrative Theology
- Adapting the African concept of Griot to the Christian Community- Story Linking
- Answer key questions in a gift/teaching inventory and write thoughts/impressions in their journal
- Hold final discussion for the day and close

THE ELDER AS CHRISTIAN GRIOT

Let's listen to the Story Corps Griot

http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/charlie-morris-and-sylvester-lewis/

http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/category/griot/page/2/

The Christian Griot and the Carrying of Old Speech

Please follow along with the handout: The Listening Passage from Old Speech Parabola, Spring 1994

Points to Remember:

Speech links people, establishes order, teaches lessons, and engages in meaningful discourse

Learned values- these can be applied to the Christian community

Passing on- history, knowledge, stories that teach, serving as living libraries

Villages have Griots- Christian communities should have Griots

An Anointing with "old speech"- all present have the ability to speak "old speech"

Overcome obstacles- Even in Africa technology disrupts communal patterns and relationships "prefer television to tradition stories".

Let's review your gift inventory. Consider your high scores and list the categories in your journal.

Consider This

Discuss the learning passage and how the possession of "Old Speech" relates to you. Take a few moments and write in your journal a few sentences about the kind of "old speech" you possess.

THE DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN GRIOT

The Christian griot is a prophetic elder who, through their spoken and collected stories, passes on a living faith by building relationships with the purpose of sharing knowledge, wisdom, and experiences that call oncoming generations to trust and serve the living God.

*As for you, Titus, promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome **teaching**.*
*2 **Teach** the older men... to exercise self-control, to be worthy of respect, and to live wisely. They must have sound faith and be filled with love and patience.*
*3 Similarly, **teach** the older women to live in a way that honors God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers.* Instead, **they should teach** others what is good.*
*4 These older women **must train the younger** women to love their husbands and their children,*
5 to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.*
*6 In the same way, **encourage** the young men to live wisely.*
7 And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. [28]

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[28] Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (3rd ed.) (Tt 2:1–7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Consider This

Finish this Statement: The mission of the Christian Griot in the Christian community and the world is_____

Read our definition of the Christian Griot and the Titus 2 passage. Discuss and write down in your journals comments on how this definition and the Titus 2 passage can be linked.

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY REVISITED

"[11] Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.* [29]

[28] And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. [29] For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn* among many brothers and sisters.*[30]

Have you ever thought about the fact that God is always "in advance"? There is nothing that can "sneak up" on God. He won't, He can't, miss one thing in our lives. Why? Because God was before our lives, He is in our lives, He is ahead of our lives and He has *written* our lives. This is the essence of narrative theology. *Narrative* deals with the story. *Theology* deals with the study of God. Therefore in simplest terms narrative theology is *God's Story.* An important part of God's story is the calling out of the body of believers called the Church. But the Church is still made up of individuals, and God is the author of the story of each individual. From the work

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[29] Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (3rd ed.) (Eph 1:11). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

[30] Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (3rd ed.) (Ro 8:28–29). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life we are informed that, "...each of us does indeed have a unique personal narrative, and one whose essential shape is not always easily discerned."[31] We are familiar with the word "testimony". If believers were to put their testimony in simplest terms they could, according to Jacobs, use the words, "I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see." This is the foundation of Christian testimony: once I was lost and blind in Adam, now I have been found and see clearly in Christ. ***God found us so that He could tell His story through us, lifted off of the printed page of scripture into real life.*** We through this testimony become what the story was in the beginning; we become the message, we become the words. As you tell stories as a Christian Griot, you are not only telling your story, you are telling of your role, your experience, in God's story. The songwriter says, "everything that happened to me that was good, God did it." We can add, everything that happened to me that was bad, God worked it out for my good.

STORY LINKING: OUR STORY TO HIS-STORY

Often it is most difficult to accept our fact. Such acceptance means to say `yes" to that which is our own bill of particulars.... It means being very specific about ourselves. This is our face, not another's; it will always be our face exhibiting a countenance that reveals all the laughter and all the tears of our years of living.... No substitute can be found for wherever we will, knock at every door, our face remains our face. -HOWARD THURMAN THE INWARD JOURNEY[32]

What do we believe about ourselves? Is it positive or negative? Our self perception is developed through place and through experiences in those places. The key is to place a value upon ourselves that is above place and experience. This value comes from our place in and our purpose from God. It is one thing to say that with God all things are possible, it is another thing

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[31] Alan Jacobs. Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life (Stob Lectures 2006) 4. Kindle Edition.

[32] Anne Streaty Wimberly. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education (Kindle Locations 436-439). Kindle Edition.

entirely to completely trust, believe, and obey from that perspective because we fight against the voices and experiences that serve to form within us an identity from negative experience versus an identity from God that is ours to possess in spite of negative experience. Consider this:

> I wrestle with myself even now-with who I am, what I ought to be, and how to get unstuck when I get into one of those places that triggers self-doubt. Deep down inside, though, I see myself as a good person. And, even when I have doubts, I know that God knows who I am. Regardless what others think or do and, really, regardless of my own getting in my own way, I believe God sees me as valuable. I just need to be reminded about that every now and then. And, I need to be reminded that God is there for me when I come upon those obstacles that bring about self-doubt.[33]

The story that this quote comes from is a fictional life story. Like every story it was formed through, "self-identity, social context, interpersonal relationships, life events, and life meanings."[34] You have an everyday story that is formed in the same way. You have circumstances that have occurred in your life that have caused you to think of yourself in a particular way. Your challenge is not to appropriate those negatives and confront those negatives with God's word concerning you. This is story linking, attaching your story to God's estimation of you. Story linking allows you to use the scriptures as a mirror and see yourself the way God sees you. And as a Christian Griot and Prophetic Elder it is necessary for you to see yourself this way and then bring someone else to the place where they can link themselves to God and the story He is writing for their lives. In short, the Christian Griot and Prophetic Elder challenges the individual and community to see itself as a creation of God whose story is authored by God, controlled by God and finished by God. As one encouraging quote reads, "God will work out everything in the end, if everything hasn't been worked out, then it's not the end." Hallelujah!

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[33] Anne Streaty Wimberly. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education (Kindle Locations 486-489). Kindle Edition.

[34] Ibid, location 456

Consider This

Read Psalm 139. Link your story to this Psalm. How can linking yourself and your experiences to this story change your self-perception? How can linking yourself to this Psalm "unchain" you or someone else from negative self perceptions? Discuss and write about it in your journal.

SESSION 6

A PREPARED PROPHETIC ELDER: I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY

The sixth session of the project seeks to continue to prepare Elders to take on the role of Christian griot by:

- Review information from the previous week
- Further encouraging the Elder of the need for their story
- Revisiting the gifts/life experiences that make each one a "specialized griot".
- Samples of question and interview design
- Setting up a session with a Prophetic Elder and a member of the Oncoming Generation
- Hold final discussion for the day and close

NOW MORE THAN EVER

Let's listen to the Story Corps Griot

http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/charlie-morris-and-sylvester-lewis/

http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/category/griot/page/2/

A STORY NEAR YOU....

A work on ministry in cities entitled *The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Urban World*, we have four networks of primary relationships:

1. Biological- family and extended family, which may be local or distant.
2. Geographical- people we know because of where we live
3. Vocational- the people with whom we work
4. Recreational- the people with whom we play or otherwise escape urban realities.[35]

In each of these areas there is someone hurting, someone in need of direction and hope, someone in need of not just any answer, but the answer. We know the answer is Jesus Christ, but before

[35]Ray Bakke. The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Urban World. Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1987.

we can offer Christ as savior, we must offer ourselves as a sacrifice on the altar of relationship building. No matter how disconnected people seem in the Twitter, Google, Internet, Facebook world, no matter how bogged down in multi-tasking or pre-occupation with chasing the next thing to help them survive or keep their heads above water, someone is in need of a friend, fellowship, love, and acceptance. Your network of relationships is an opportunity to be a witness, but to also establish your called, biblically mandated position as an Elder with wisdom of years who has experienced through orientation, disorientation, and reorientation a mighty big God with whom you have linked your story. You can invite someone to link their story with God's story.

A PROPHET FOR THE UNCHURCHED

In the research study *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them,* this statistic cries out to the Prophetic Elder which tells us that there is still hope that the faith of our fathers and mothers can be passed on to oncoming generations. The questions in particular concern an opinion about Christianity and general and those searching for guidance. Of the group surveyed, 74% of those surveyed believed that the Christian religion is a relevant and viable religion for today. In the same group, when asked about sources of inspirational guidance, 41% of ages 20-29 and 29% of ages 30 and over said they would, "talk or listen to an *inspirational person.* "[36] (Italics mine). The majority of "unchurched" in the oncoming generations would seek a relational encounter, a person, before reading a book, watching TV, or even going to a church. Building relationships will make ALL of the difference.

[36]Ed Stetzer et al. Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them. 2009 Tennessee B&H Publishing.

DOCUMENTING THE PROPHETIC ELDER

The most important part of the Elder's story is getting them in front of the people in the oncoming generations that need to hear them both in and outside of the Christian community. While this may happen either formally or informally, the initial encounter for this project will be a video documentation of the Prophetic Elder's interaction with someone who needs to hear their story.

The types of questions will be general, documenting social, family, work, and life experiences. Then specific questions will link the Elder to their faith narrative with questions that will address experiences of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. The hearer/interviewer can tap into the wisdom and faith of the Christian Griot being interviewed.

Construction of these questions will be based on the following sources, including but not limited to:

The "Great Questions" pages of the Story Corp Griot website:

Our Help In Ages Past: The Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly

Strategies for Educating African American Adults

Models of Theological Reflection, Story linking, and Narrative Theology from:

Transforming the Rough Places (Ch.6), *Soul Stories,* and *Looking Before and After*

WILLING AND ABLE?

If you are willing, God is able. Sharing your knowledge, wisdom and faith is a biblical mandate. If it were not a part of your calling, I don't believe you would be here. I hope you will trust that God will use you through this process and anoint you to speak into the lives of oncoming generations and make the prophetic call that speaks to their souls from the deep love of God in Christ Jesus. You are equipped now. You are prepared. You are a Prophetic Elder. You are a Christian Griot. Thank you so much for taking this journey. Now, *go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, TEACHING THEM to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the Age- The Lord Jesus Christ.*

ORAL FAITH NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

The researcher's project Prophetic Elder: Restoring the Voice and Legacy of the Silent Generation as Traditional Griots in a Christian Community, has prepared Elders through surveys, Bible study and teaching sessions to share and preserve their faith narratives. These questions have been prepared for the collection of the faith narratives of Elders in a Christian community. The goals of this oral faith narrative collection are to share and preserve the Elder's experiences of life and faith highlighting moments of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation along with brief biographical sketches, memories of their youth in the Church (if any), conversion experiences, and encouragement and exhortation for the viewer/listener to return to and keep the faith of our fathers. The oral histories that are collected will be archived on external hard drives. They have potential for use in discipleship, counseling, and teaching moments. The state of the art foundations of this oral faith narrative project are taken from guidelines established by the Southern Oral History Program, the Story Corps organization, and references from *Our Help in Ages Past: The Black Church's Ministry Among the Elderly* by Bobby Joe Saucer and *Strategies for Educating African American Adults* by Alvin Lewis.

Interviews should be appropriately documented for archival purposes. An interview should consistently begin with the name of the interviewees, the interviewer, interview date, and location. The name of the project, such as the Prophetic Elders project, should be mentioned as well. The questions are as follows:

Tell me where you are from and when you were born?

What was your childhood like?

Do you remember any favorite meals or recipes?

Who were some of your favorite relatives when you were growing up?

Do you have any favorite remembrances of your favorite relatives?

Do you remember any stories they would tell or advice they would give?

Do you remember anyone from your pre-adult years that positively influenced on your life?

Do you remember the kind of student you were in grade school?

Did face any negative peer pressure?

How did you further your education?

How early in your life did you start working? Do you remember your first job and/ or your first job in adulthood?

What were the times you grew up in like? What were some significant things you remember happening in the world?

What are your earliest memories of going to Church? Do you remember your denomination?

What were your Church services like? What was the preaching and singing like? What kind of atmosphere did your home church have? Did all get along that you can remember?

Do you remember your conversion experience?

What did your Christian education consist of? (Sunday School, Bible Study, Member of Church groups or ministries)

What is your favorite book of the Bible or verse? What is your favorite song?

Did people know you were a Christian? How were you treated?

Do you remember anyone who was a positive influence on you from your Church life?

How was the faith practiced in your home? (Prayer, Bible reading time, singing?)

When were you married?

How did you become one with your husband/wife? What were some of the key issues you faced as a couple and how did you overcome them?

Can you share some memories of what it was like when your first child was born and how you raised your family? (What advice would you give on raising children?)

Can you talk about times when you felt most blessed in your life, when you knew God was in control and things were going well?

Do you mind talking about a time in your life when you may have turned away from God and how you came to turn back to God.

Can you talk about times of crisis in your life that challenged your faith? (Times that were the toughest, an illness or death, when you may have felt the greatest sadness or stress, a time when you depended on God most or you may have even thought God had forsaken you?)

How did your faith play a role in handling those tough times?

How would you compare life today with your life growing up?

Can you name something you have seen done by people young or old today that would never have been done in your youth or early adult life?

Please talk a little about work ethics. Do you see a difference in work ethic today than you did back then?

How has your faith grown over the years? What is different from your younger years up to now?

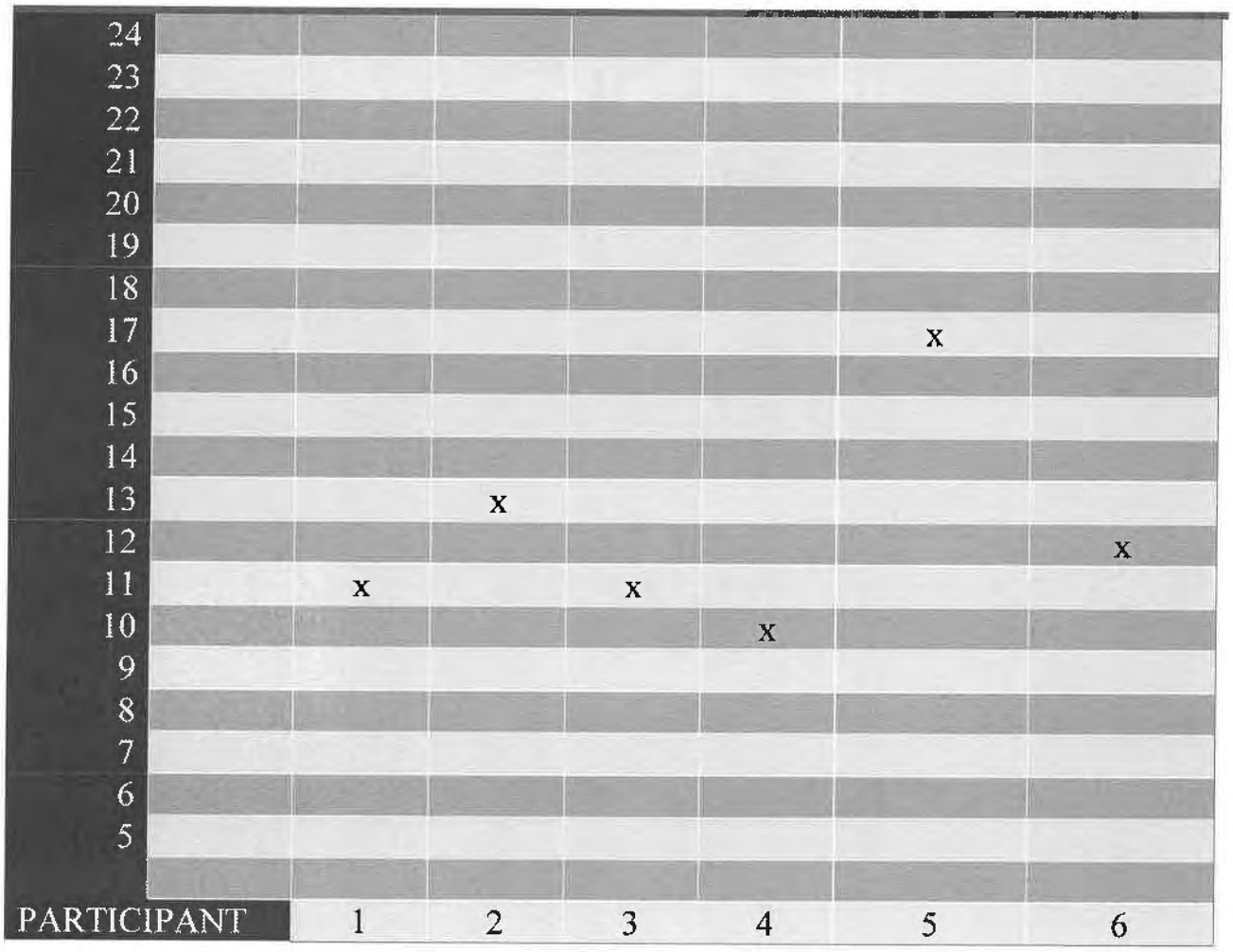
As we close could you give a final testimony about what God has done for you and what would you tell someone seeing and listening today about believing God and trusting Jesus Christ?

These questions can be changed or adapted to suit the core subject of another program or interviewers focus. The purpose is to share a life in the context of a faith narrative that will encourage oncoming generations that if those they are seeing and hearing overcame by trusting God they will turn in faith and trust to him as well.

APPENDIX C

MOTIVATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

Motivational Gift- Perceiver



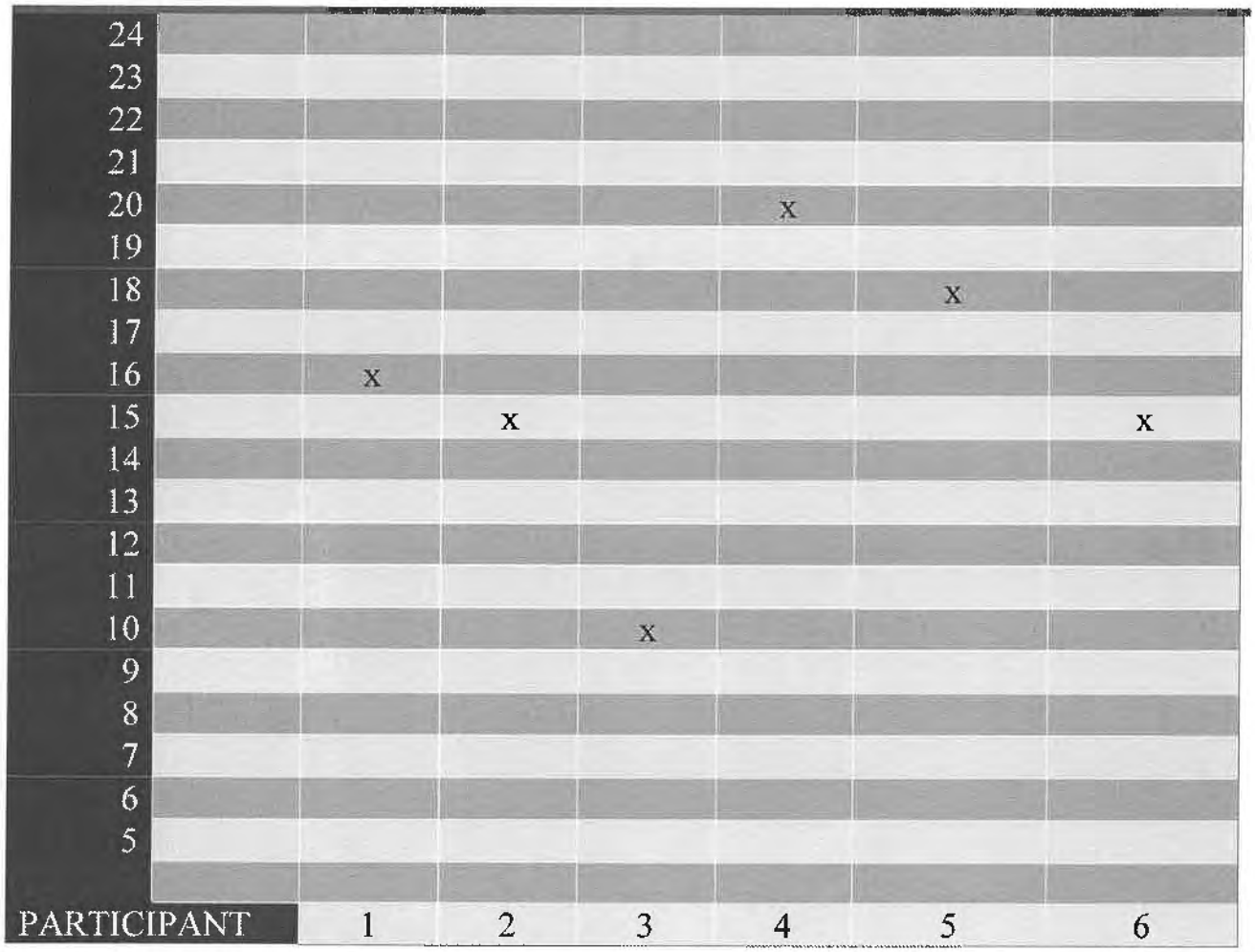
KEY:

HIGH= 17 or above

MODERATE= 11-16

LOW= 10 or below

Motivational Gift- Server



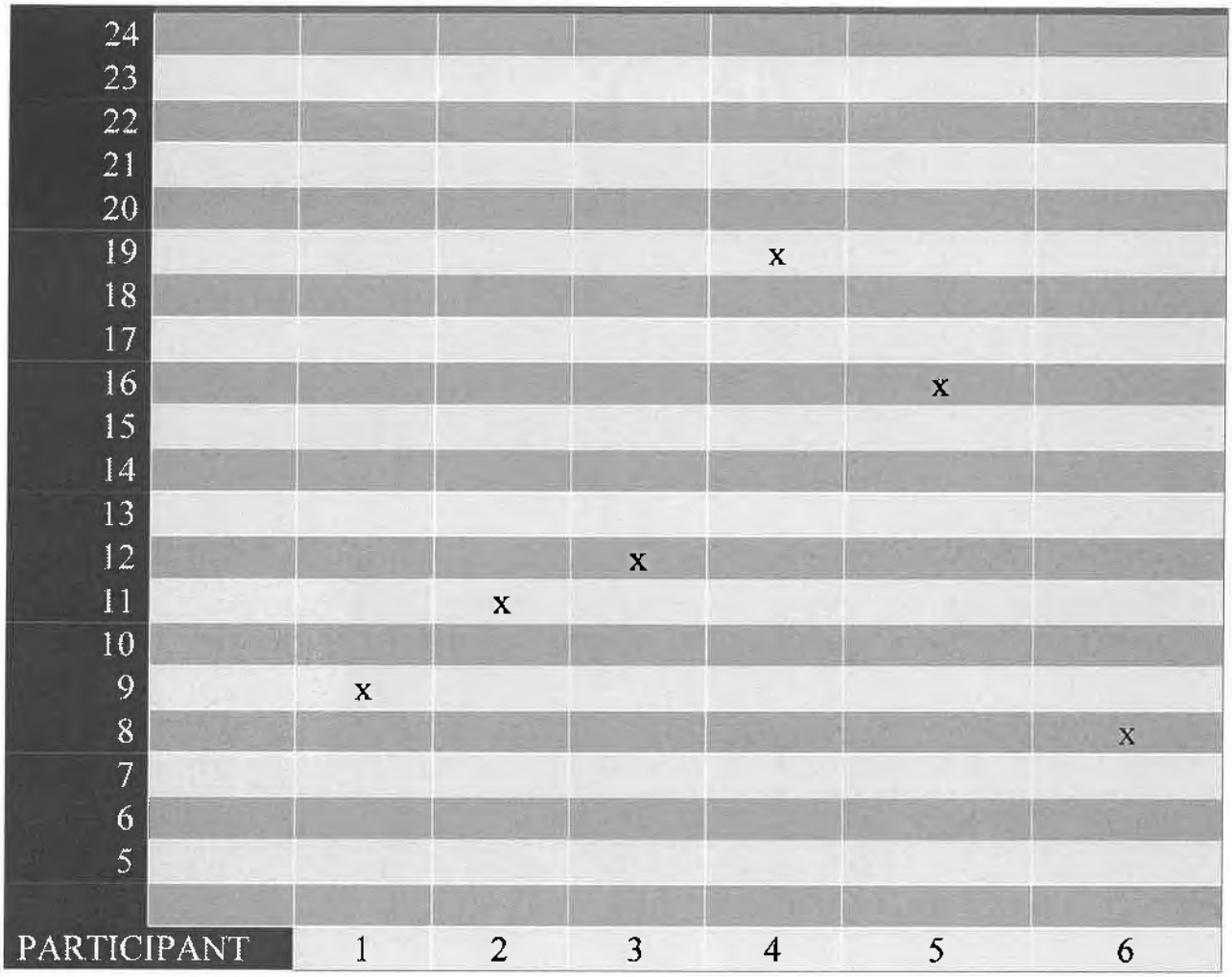
KEY:

HIGH= 17 or above

MODERATE= 11-16

LOW= 10 or below

Motivational Gift- Teacher



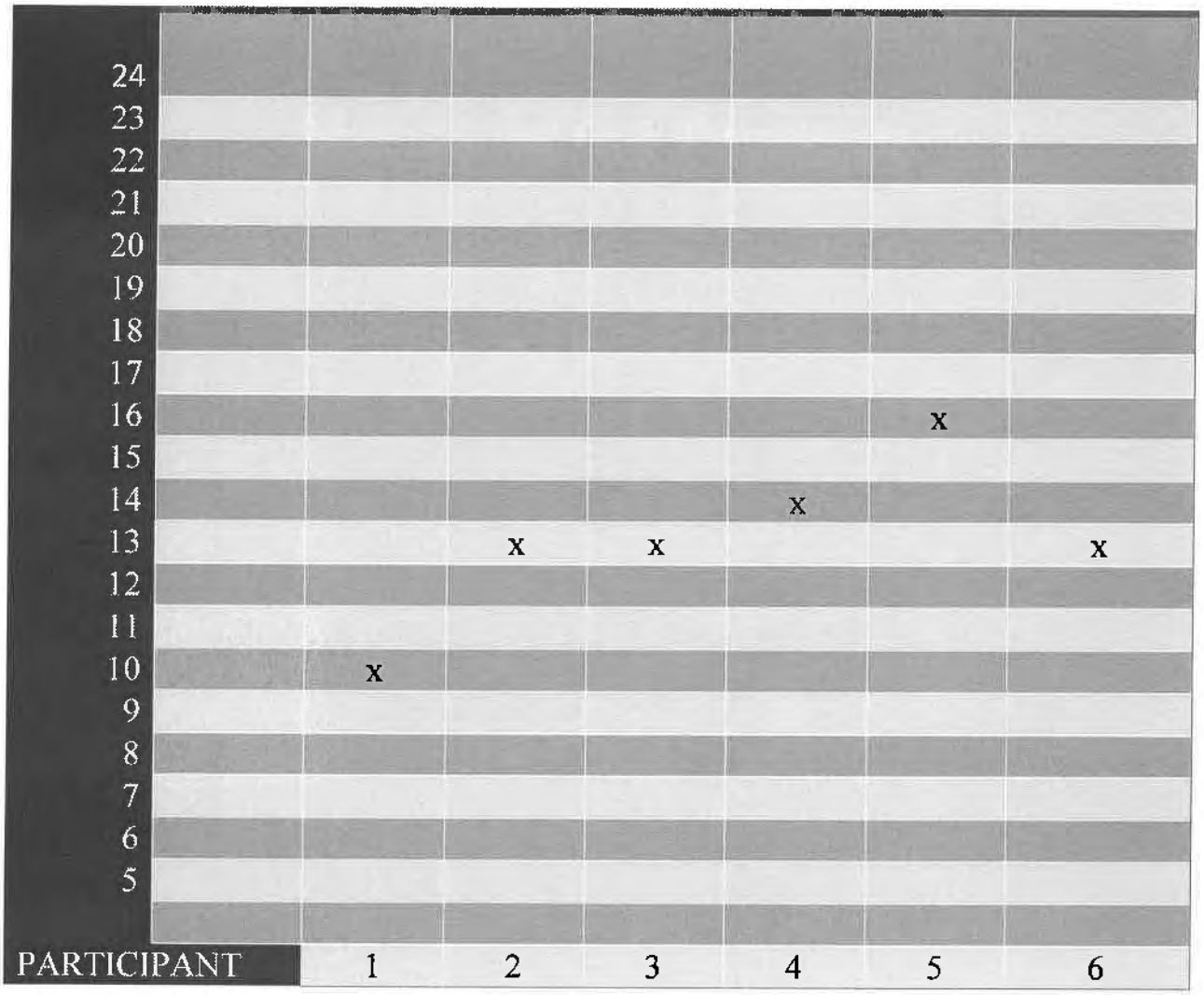
KEY:

HIGH= 17 or above

MODERATE= 11-16

LOW= 10 or below

Motivational Gift- Encourager



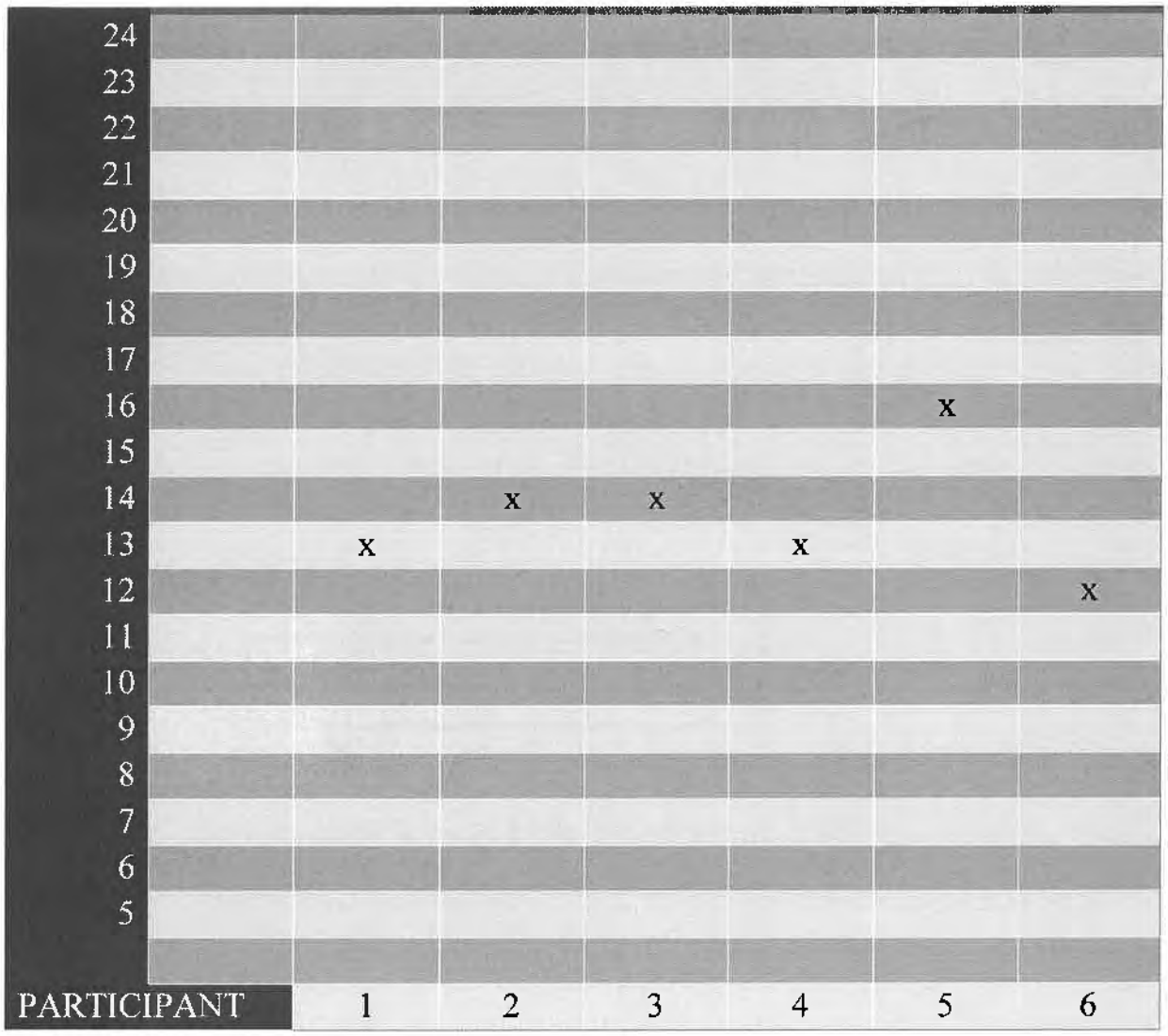
KEY:

HIGH= 17 or above

MODERATE= 11-16

LOW= 10 or below

Motivational Gift- Giver



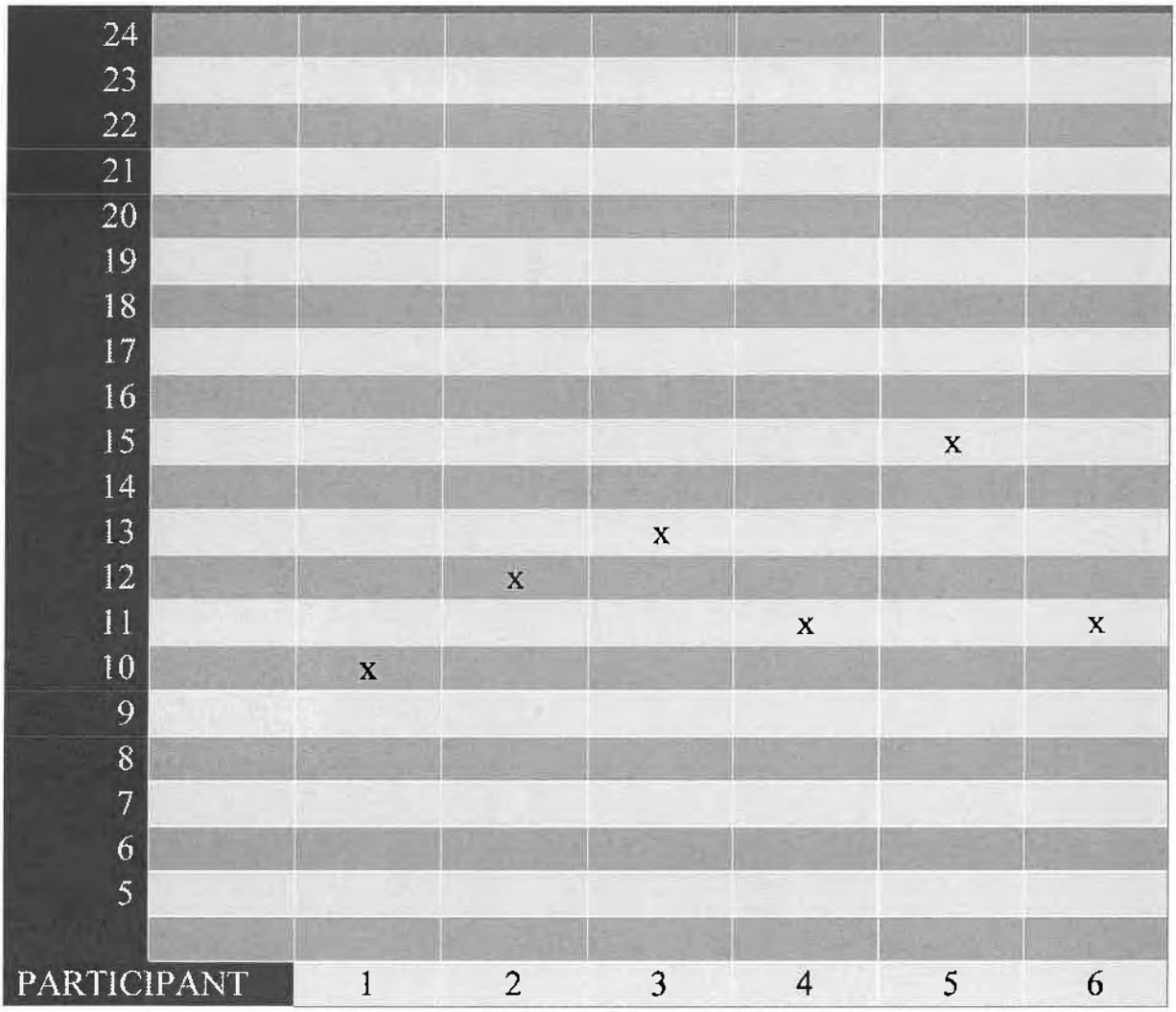
KEY:

HIGH= 17 or above

MODERATE= 11-16

LOW= 10 or below

Motivational Gift- Ruler



KEY:

HIGH= 17 or above

MODERATE= 11-16

LOW= 10 or below

Motivational Gift- Mercy

	1	2	3	4	5	6
24				x		
23						
22						
21						
20						
19					x	
18			x			
17						
16						x
15	x	x				
14						
13						
12						
11						
10						
9						
8						
7						
6						
5						
PARTICIPANT						

KEY:

HIGH= 17 or above

MODERATE= 11-16

LOW= 10 or below

GIFT CATEGORIES ACCORDING TO SCALE OF LOW MEDIUM OR HIGH

1		3		4		
2		0		7		
3		1		5		1
4		1		3		3
5		0		4		3
6		1		6		
PARTICIPANTS		LOW		MODERATE		HIGH

APPENDIX D

PRE and POST SURVEY RESULTS BY QUESTION

QUESTION ONE

As a Senior I am a Valuable Part of the Church of Jesus Christ

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
1= STRONGLY AGREE		5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT		
2= AGREE		6=DISAGREE		
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE		7=STRONGLY DISAGREE		
4=UNDECIDED				

The researcher saw no significant movement, which is a positive finding, as the participants began with a positive self perception as members of the Church of Jesus Christ

QUESTION TWO

Seniors should be keepers of the faith and cultural traditions of a community

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	

1= STRONGLY AGREE	5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

The researcher saw no significant movement, which is a positive finding, as the participants began with a positive self perception of seniors as keepers of faith and culture in a community.

QUESTION THREE

God's word gives me responsibilities to fulfill at this age/stage of my life

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	1		1	
1= STRONGLY AGREE		5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT		
2= AGREE		6=DISAGREE		
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE		7=STRONGLY DISAGREE		
4=UNDECIDED				

The researcher saw no significant movement, which is a positive finding, as the participants began with that age does not excuse them from fulfilling God's word no matter what age they have reached.

QUESTION FOUR

I understand the definition of the term prophetic

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST
1	2		1
2	7		2
3	4		1
4	2		2
5	2		1
1= STRONGLY AGREE		5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT	
2= AGREE		6=DISAGREE	
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE		7=STRONGLY DISAGREE	
4=UNDECIDED			

The researcher saw movement in understanding of a term that is critical to the definition of and activity associated with a prophetic voice in a church and community.

QUESTION FIVE

I know when God has been present in the good and bad experiences of my life

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST
1	1		1
2	1		1
3	2		1
4	1		1
5	1		1

1= STRONGLY AGREE	S=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

The researcher saw movement only with participant three which brought all participants into strong agreement that they understood that God has been present.

QUESTION SIX

I believe I can make a connection with younger people of today

PARTICIPANT	PRE	[redacted]	POST
1	1		1
2	1		1
3	2		1
4	2		2
5	2		1

1= STRONGLY AGREE	5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

The researcher saw movement as the participants began with a positive belief in their ability to make a connection which is only strengthed by getting informed by the instruction from the project

QUESTION SEVEN

I can encourage struggling people to have faith in God to help them

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
1	1		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	3		1	

1= STRONGLY AGREE	5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

The researcher saw no significant movement in most participants. However participant five who showed some hesitancy in both quantitative and qualitative results shows very positive movement.

QUESTION EIGHT

I know and believe I can use my spiritual gifts

PARTICIPANT	PRE	POST
1	1	1
2	1	1
3	2	1
4	2	1
5	2	1

1= STRONGLY AGREE	5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

The researcher saw postive movement in this question, which the researcher believes was effected by motivational gifts survey taken by the participants.

QUESTION NINE

I am uncomfortable sharing my life story

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST
1	7		1
2	1		7
3	6		6
4	1		5
5	5		3

1= STRONGLY AGREE	5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

There was some confusion with participants about how to accurately mark the survey for this question. But clarifying conversations revealed that those participants that were confused on the presurvey understood on the post survey that they should have marked the numbers five, six or seven to show a positive response. Participant five's responses are based on his personal self perception not on misunderstanding of how to mark the survey

QUESTION TEN

I can teach younger people the life lessons I have learned

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST
1	1		1
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	1		1
5	3		1

1= STRONGLY AGREE	5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

The researcher again saw positive movement from participant five. From a slight bit of uncertainty to strongly agreeing is a good sign that the teaching impacted this participtant positively.

QUESTION ELEVEN

My walk of faith has meaning and should be shared with others

PARTICIPANT	PRE	[redacted]	POST
1	1		1
2	1		1
3	2		1
4	1		1
5	2		1

1= STRONGLY AGREE	5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
2= AGREE	6=DISAGREE
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE	7=STRONGLY DISAGREE
4=UNDECIDED	

The researcher saw no significant movement, but participants 3 and 5 moved to strong agreement that their faith should be shared for the benefit of others

QUESTION TWELVE

When church members are experiencing problems, I should be a voice of wisdom and encouragement

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST
1	2		1
2	1		1
3	2		1
4	1		1
5	2		1
1= STRONGLY AGREE		5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT	
2= AGREE		6=DISAGREE	
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE		7=STRONGLY DISAGREE	
4=UNDECIDED			

The researcher saw no significant movement, but is encouraged to know that the participants believe they should bear one anothers burdens.

QUESTION THIRTEEN

My wisdom and experiences should be preserved for my family

PARTICIPANT	PRE		POST	
1	5		1	
2	1		1	
3	1		1	
4	1		1	
5	2		1	
1= STRONGLY AGREE		5=DISAGREE SOMEWHAT		
2= AGREE		6=DISAGREE		
3=SOMEWHAT AGREE		7=STRONGLY DISAGREE		
4=UNDECIDED				

The researcher saw no significant movement. Participant 1 admittedly marked the survey incorrectly. The participant not only admitted this later, but also wrote a notation by the question on the survey that shows she is interested in sharing her story outside of her family.

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